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Memoirs of Moses Mendelssohn, the Jewish



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**MEMOIRS**

**OF**

**MOSES MENDELSON.**

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MEMOIRS  
OF  
MOSES MENDELSON,

THE  
*JEWISH PHILOSOPHER*;

INCLUDING  
THE CELEBRATED CORRESPONDENCE,  
On the Christian Religion,

WITH  
J. C. LAVATER, MINISTER OF ZURICH.

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By M. SAMUELS.

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SECOND EDITION.

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LONDON:  
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1827.



# PREFACE

TO THE

## SECOND EDITION.

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It is one of the most admirable and consolatory provisions of nature, that few circumstances can exist so altogether uncongenial and depressive as to wholly extinguish the fire of original genius, or altogether impede general aptitude of an exalted description. Of this grateful truth a more striking instance can scarcely be afforded than that which is supplied by the Memoirs of Moses Mendelsohn. Few more impressive examples exist of the nurture of an elevated and philosophic mind amidst obstacles so utterly unfavourable to its development. Born a member of a peculiar and discouraged people, with much to encounter from the bigotry and prejudices of a portion of his own tribe, and still more from the kindred failings of those who despised and oppressed it; labouring under poverty and a weak constitution, farther debilitated by incessant mental exertion, this extraordinary man not only advanced himself to general respectability by the purity and elevation of his philosophic views, but to an equality and companionship with the leading intellectual spirits of his age and country. In this point of view the Life of Mendelsohn stands beautifully distinguished, and claims the peculiar attention of all to whom the study of human nature, in its more attractive varieties, is at once a means of instruction and a source of pleasure.

But in addition to the value of the following pages, as forming the biography of a highly-gifted and distinguished in-

dividual, it claims extraordinary attention from the light which it throws upon the principles and opinions of the more intellectual and philosophical portion of the Jewish community. Thus regarded, its composition by one whose origin and sympathies have led him to a deep and feeling appreciation of the high merit of the subject of his narrative, only adds to the information and curiosity of the book. The included reply of Mendelsohn to the celebrated and eccentric Lavater, so explicit on the principles which regulate the more strict and influential Jews in reference to proselytism, is also a singularly interesting document, especially as conveying a due notion of the liberal opinions of the most enlightened of the Jewish doctors on the spiritual condition of the virtuous of other creeds. Lastly, the evidence therein afforded of the existence of a rising disposition among this ancient race to participate more largely in the general progress of science and information, in addition to the peculiar education suggested by their own religion and history, is of a nature to excite both interest and attention. As amusingly illustrative on all these points, the Memoirs of Moses Mendelsohn merit the perusal more directly due to facts and disclosures which, although of a special and peculiar class, not only advance the knowledge of our common nature, but tend to prove how essentially man is the same being, however various the guises imposed by education, custom, and social condition; and consequently, how absolutely mutual toleration, general forbearance, and universal good-will, comprise the interest as well as duty of all mankind.

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## PREFACE.

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SUPERIOR learning and eminent talents command respect under every circumstance. Nor are they less estimable for having been acquired in the usual routine of methodical education and academic study, either afforded by reputable parents, or provided by public institutions, where may be found example to imitate, well-directed ambition to inspire, and hopes of honour and preferment to support and invigorate; with no immediate cares to damp or distract, no prejudices to check or intimidate, but “with all means and appliances to boot.” In these cases, however, though we justly praise and value excellence *as such*; we cannot discover in it more than a successful result of industry and perseverance, aided by propitious natural qualities, and facilitated by auxiliary advantages. Like exquisite plants, reared with patience, and nurtured with care, these favoured minds are fructified by the genial

rays of salutary ambition, prospective fame and reward: they are highly pleasing, but by no means rare productions: but when we see an individual excel in various sciences, who is the offspring of humble and indigent parents, born in an obscure town, amongst a scanty and poor community: \*—when we see him soar, eagle-like, to the grand luminary of science and knowledge, nothing appalled, though living in an age that had but just began to emerge from the mist of bigotry and prejudice, in which so many of its predecessors had been enveloped: †—when we discover an eloquent writer, a great philosopher, amongst a people deteriorated and paralysed by ill-treatment and oppression; amongst a people cruelly neglected, and impolitically excluded from the emporiums of polite learning and useful knowledge:—when we consider that this individual left his native home, a solitary wanderer, unpatronised, unrecommended, without money, decent clothing, or expectation, without any thing on earth, indeed,

\* Compare *Mendelsohn's* own words in the article against *Michaelis's* Critic, in *Dohm's* "Political Improvement of the Jews," vol. ii.

† Germany, at the beginning of the 18th century.

but a firm reliance on Providence:—when we know that he had no example to stimulate, no encouragement to solace, not even an alluring probability to speculate upon;—we shall find ample cause for wonder and admiration. And if it appears that this individual had moreover to struggle through life against some of the bitterest opposers of study and meditation, namely, a feeble constitution, pinching want, the bereavement of an only teacher, and the machinations of jealousy, and nevertheless attained to an almost unparalleled degree of perfection in every science he applied himself to, ultimately towering above all his competitors:—we may, without being thought enthusiasts, hail him as the harbinger of better days to a fallen—but not an irreclaimable—people, and of its redemption from the trammels of supineness, and the spell of superstition, in which it had so long previously been lingering; as, indeed, an admirable instrument in the hands of an all-directing Power, to pave the way for the reestablishment of this people in its natural inheritance of wisdom, knowledge, and individual and national consideration.





MEMOIRS  
OF  
MOSES MENDELSON, &c.

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MOSES MENDELSON was born in September, 1729, at *Dessau* in Germany, where his father was a transcriber of the *Pentateuch*,\* and kept a Hebrew day-school ; both very humble and precarious professions every where, but at that time and in that town in particular, scarcely adequate to the support of their follower. Yet he managed to maintain his son until he left the parental roof, and, even then, would not part with him till he could no longer withstand his incessant entreaties.

According to the then prevailing system of educating Jew-boys, young *Mendelsohn* was

\* *Sopher*.

sent to the public seminary, where children were taught to prattle mechanically the *Mishna* and *Gemarra* concerning laws of betrothing, divorce, legal damages, sacerdotal functions, and other similar matters above their comprehension, before they were able to read and understand a single text of Scripture correctly. *Mr. David Friedlander*, *Moses Mendelsohn's* bosom friend and excellent pupil, has heard him relate, that when he was only seven years old, and of a very delicate constitution, his father would make him rise at three or four o'clock on winter mornings, and after giving him a cup of tea, would carry him wrapped in a roquelaure to the Jewish seminary. *Mendelsohn* however was not like other children; already at that tender age, the spirit of inquiry stirred within him, and he apprehended that he was not pursuing the proper course to arrive at solid knowledge. Finding that without knowing the Hebrew language grammatically, it would be out of his power to see his way clearly through any Commentary, it being impossible to verify the rules and directions laid down by the later commentators,

without knowing how to trace the outlines marked by the primitive teachers ; he therefore resolved to make Scripture his principal study, and to use himself to write Hebrew with purity and elegance ; an accomplishment which he seems not to have been long in acquiring ; for before his tenth year, he had composed Hebrew verses, which however, when he arrived at a riper age, so little pleased his taste as a critic, that he would never after compose another line of original poetry in that language. “ I have no genius for poetry,” he would say. “ My mind is more disposed to penetrate into the deep recesses of the understanding, than to roam in the lighter regions of fancy.” Nevertheless his metrical translations of the *Psalms*, and other scriptural books, are splendid proofs of his eminent knowledge of the art of poetry, although he himself had but a mean opinion of his powers in this respect ; witness the letter he wrote to the celebrated bard, Professor *Rammeler*, in which he requested the professor to let the *Psalms* undergo the ordeal of his examination before they were published. Thus industrious, Men-

*delsohn* soon made himself master of the text of the *Talmud*, under the public tuition of Rabbi *David Frankel*, then chief rabbi at *Dessau*; and of Scripture, without any teacher at all. And it has been asserted by a creditable person, who associated with him in his youth, at *Berlin*, that he knew nearly the whole of the *Law* and the *Prophets* by heart.

At that time *Maimonides More nebochim*, i.e. *the Guide of the Perplexed*, fell into his hands. To discover its transcendent beauties, and to strain every nerve in studying it, was one and the same thing with him. He meditated on it by day and by night, till he had dived into the depth of its sublime thoughts; and, to his last moments, he acknowledged the benefit he had derived from this work. It was the fountain at which he slacked, for the first time, his thirst after wisdom and knowledge; it was the pedestal of his future glory.

Though soul and body are wedded together through life, though they conjugally share all the good and evil dispensations in this world, yet there are times when they assume the appearance of mutual hostility. The listless

son of indolence and comfort gets portly and strong, at the expense of the vigour and elasticity of his mind. He, on the contrary, who delights in study, regardless of health, and defying infirmities, falls away and becomes enfeebled. The latter could not fail to be the case with *Mendelsohn*. Incessant search after knowledge, and intense study of *Maimonides*, at length impaired his health, and brought on a nervous disorder, the neglect of which produced deformity of the spine, and made him a valetudinarian for the remainder of his life. “*Maimonides*,” he once remarked facetiously, “is the cause of my deformity, he spoiled my figure, and ruined my constitution: but still I doat on him, for many hours of dejection which he has converted into those of rapture. And if he have, unwittingly, weakened my body, has he not made ample atonement, by invigorating my soul with his sublime instructions?”

Rabbi *D. Frankel* removing about this time to *Berlin*, where he had been elected Chief of the Congregation, *Mendelsohn* found himself bereft of his only friend and teacher, and

without any means of continuing his public studies. To hawking and peddling, which were then, much more than at present, the general, indeed almost the only, resource of indigent Jew-lads immediately after confirmation, *Mendelsohn* had, for various reasons, an insurmountable aversion: he therefore proposed to his father to let him join his late teacher; and having, after much entreaty, prevailed in this request, he left his native place, at the age of fourteen, and proceeded to *Berlin*.

On his arrival in the capital of *Prussia*, he had not sufficient money to provide even a single meal. In this distress he applied to Rabbi *Frankel* to befriend him, for old acquaintance sake; and there he happened to meet with *Mr. Hyam Bamberg*, a benevolent man, and encourager of aspiring young Jews, who allowed him, on the rabbi's intercession, an attic-room in his house to sleep in, and two days' board weekly. With this benefactor, he found a comfortable asylum for a considerable period, continuing his study of the *Talmud* under his former teacher, and that of philo-

sophy in his sequestered chamber. All his acquaintance were partial to him, for he was social and engaging with every body, and seldom failed to make a favourable impression at first sight. Yet he was by no means communicative, as to his philosophical pursuits, nor did he suffer his knowledge and sagacity to transpire in mixed society, that he might avoid the occasional acrimony of disputation. Enslaved from infancy by bashfulness, the not unfrequent concomitant of modest merit, he could not shake off the clogging sensation to the day of his death; and it imbued him with such inveterate timidity, that even in discussions, where he had decidedly the advantage, he was never known to exult or be dictatorial, but would confine himself to courteous and temperate demonstration. This his traducers, the "pestilence which stalketh in darkness," would fain construe into sycophancy. *Mendelsohn*, however, was no sycophant; but being, by nature, the humblest and meekest of mortals, and an utter stranger to guile and dissimulation, he had made it an invariable rule to turn away wrath with a soft answer,

and perhaps the only prejudice he could never overcome, was that against his own abilities. Neither censorious as a friend, nor caustic as a critic, he gave only hints where others would chide; and never indulged in satire, so long as logic would answer the purpose. Indeed, through this excessive modesty, we have to regret the loss of most of his juvenile effusions, written at periods when his soul was intenerated by trouble and affliction, and when he was deaf to every friendly suggestion to apply to his wealthy brethren for assistance, to enable him to cultivate his studies.—On these occasions he would reply, with his characteristic self-depreciation, “Who am *I*, and what are *my* pretensions, that I should become burdensome to others, because, forsooth, I have set my mind on learning? No; I would rather live upon dry brown bread.”—This, in point of fact, he often did, as he has many times afterwards related in the circle of his friends; and that when he purchased a loaf, he would notch it, according to the standard of his finances, into so many meals, never eating according



to his appetite, but to his finances. Amidst, however, all those cares and privations, his ardour for knowledge did not in the least abate; his idolatry of wisdom scorned the usual appropriation of time and accommodation to the seasons: night and day, melting heat, and freezing cold, were alike to him.

According to *Plato's* beautiful fiction, Love is the offspring of the intercourse of Poverty with Abundance. In the same manner it might be said, that superlative and exquisite minds are generally matured by the pressure of external circumstances on native genius. The scholar, that is, he who exists for science and learning only, is an exotic in the garden of nature, who gives, in so many instances, palpable proofs that man was not intended for speculative, but for practical pursuits. It would therefore seem as if these exotics can never be cultivated unless they be forced. The attractions of social life, to which we are invited by ease and affluence, are almost too enticing for the ardent youth, who has once tasted them, to

be supposed willing to sacrifice them to the austere routine of study, or the dreary seclusion of meditation. But this propensity to the pleasures of society and the enjoyments of life—inseparable indeed from our nature, but decidedly hostile to the culture of genius and the manifestation of energy—poverty deprives of all its nourishment. Poverty drives man back into himself; there it compresses all his feelings, all his thoughts, imparting to the former more intenseness, to the latter, more profundity. It animates, it *winds up* imagination, and gives a peculiar tact and nicety to the observative faculty; all which, united, constitute that characteristic of genius—originality. Poverty possesses another advantage: the monotony to which its victims are constrained, disciplines their minds to more than ordinary steadiness, leading, especially in the studious, to a peculiar obstinacy and perseverance with respect to certain points and objects; whence only works of ingenuity derive solidity, and those of genius, correctness and classicality. Notwithstanding, however, al-

most more than human exertions, *Mendelsohn* despaired of ever gaining access to the sanctuary of the temple of *Minerva*, otherwise than by the regular avenues of the Greek and Latin languages. Procrastination, he was aware, would enhance the difficulty of their acquisition, which, being chiefly a process of memory, could be easily conquered only by a juvenile and unburthened mind; whilst the ignorance of them, he equally well knew, would be ultimately of incalculable disadvantage. Yet how to acquire those languages without, at least, some oral instructions, or elementary book, was a problem that he could not solve, and which preyed much upon his spirits: moreover, the dread of being suspected by bigots of going astray, if he meddled with profane learning, deterred him from opening his mind to others, and obtaining, perhaps, some useful suggestion. Ruminating in solitude on this gordian knot, and on the probability of meeting with a friendly Alexander to cut it for him, his tutelary genius brought him acquainted with a person named *Kish*, of

*Prague*, who was then practising medicine and surgery at Berlin; and who, on perceiving *Mendelsohn's* eagerness for study, allowed him a quarter of an hour daily of gratuitous instruction in the rudiments of Latin.

Having overcome the declensions and verbs, *Mendelsohn* purchased a very old second-hand Latin dictionary for a few *groschen*, which he had saved from his earnings by copying writings for the rabbi his teacher, and now commenced, with all the force of his faculties, to read whatever he could get hold of in that language. He even ventured on a Latin translation of "Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding;" and a Herculean task it was! He had, in the first place, to consult his dictionary for almost every noun; then to translate the sentences, study and digest the author's meaning; and, finally, to meditate on the argument itself. By dint of this prodigious industry and stubborn perseverance he, at last, triumphed over all difficulties, making himself completely familiar with that abstruse work, and de-

rising from its translation the collateral advantage of becoming so well acquainted with the Roman language as to be enabled to read, successively, the Latin classics with ease and judgment, with which attainment he was highly delighted..

At that time there was at *Berlin* a Polisher, called *Israel Moses*, an excellent Hebrew scholar and profound mathematician; also a person of most enlightened mind, and amiable disposition. This man had been a martyr to liberal principles, on account of which he was obliged to leave his native country, then swarming with fanatic zealots. *Mendelsohn* courted his society, in order to profit by his conversation. The attachment of brothers in distress, the Talmudist says, surpasses that of brethren by birth. Thus the kindred situation of these two individuals consolidated their friendship, and they became inseparable. As they were both seeking the same goal, *Mendelsohn* attended his friend's lectures on geometry, from a Hebrew translation of "Euclid's Elements," to which the latter had added many problems of his

own invention ; became fond of the science, and studied it with his characteristic ardour. In return, he imparted to *Israel Moses*, who understood no language but the Hebrew, his own readings in Latin and German, which they discussed together, and reaped, from this interesting reciprocation of intellect, a rich harvest of wisdom and useful knowledge. Becoming, in the sequel, very desirous of learning both the English and French languages, in order to be able to enjoy the masterpieces of those nations in their vernacular idiom, *Mendelsohn* solicited for this purpose *Dr. Aaron Emrick's* instructions, which were cheerfully granted ; and in a very short time he made surprising progress, and finally became a decent scholar in both these languages.

But *Moses Mendelsohn* was not doomed to pine all his life in obscurity and distress. Though we are not wedded to the popular notion, which attributes the fortuitous events in the lives of distinguished and deserving individuals to miracles wrought expressly in their behalf, or think

“ The eternal cause  
Prone for his favourites to reverse his laws,”

we are far from doubting.

“ That the good must merit God’s peculiar care ;  
But who but God can tell us *who they are* ?”

*Mr. Bernard*, an opulent man of the Jewish persuasion, seems to have had that intuition from the all-wise Power, which directs the inclinations of individuals to the general good ; for he noticed the interesting youth, and was strongly impressed in his favour. *Crito*, from love of wisdom, and a desire of encouraging merit, magnanimously maintained *Socrates*, the Greek philosopher, and his whole family ; so the worthy *Bernard*, hearing of *Mendelsohn’s* talents and high moral character, admitted him into his family, and intrusted him with the education of his children.

From that period we may date the eminence of the subject of our memoir. His salary now enabled him to supply his deficiency in books, and to take lessons in the Greek language, with which he had been

hitherto unacquainted ; while he devoted, as usual, his leisure hours to study and meditation. This was the spring in which this precious shrub, transplanted in a kinder soil, blossomed, and throve till it bore, in time, exquisite fruit. Nor did its leaves ever wither ; but, like the superb cedar, it retained its splendour to the last, to the admiration of the world, and the glory of its Creator. There was not a branch of mathematics to which *Mendelsohn* did not now apply himself ; his knowledge of algebra, fluxions, and judicial astronomy, is said to have been considerable ; and in general and natural history he was far above mediocrity. As, in some measure, a singularity, we mention his peculiar skill in mercantile accounts. He also wrote a beautiful and masterly hand ; an accomplishment not very common, nor particularly requisite, for men of letters : but he seems to have had a kind of presentiment that this secondary advantage would eventually enable him to maintain a family with credit ; and the sequel proved he had not been mistaken.

It was not long before *Mr. Bernard* had



reason to rejoice in the fortunate selection he had made of a tutor for his children. In his frequent attendance, during the hours of teaching, he could not fail being struck with *Mendelsohn's* caligraphic and arithmetical talents, and deemed the counting-house a much fitter sphere for his exertions than the school-room. Accordingly he engaged him first as clerk; then raised him to cashier; and finally made him the manager of his extensive silk manufactory, with a very liberal income. By day, he attended diligently to his employer's—afterwards his partner's—concerns, whilst the greater part of his nights were devoted to literature and study.

The great mass of Jews, in Germany and the surrounding countries, were, at that period, most deplorably deficient in education and useful knowledge. Even ordinary information and reading had almost vanished from amongst them, and few could be met with who knew Hebrew grammar; fewer still who knew that of any other language. Unsophisticated theologians, and logical Talmudists, too, had become per-

ceptibly scarce, in proportion as the vice of wandering from good sense, and the intelligible precepts of the primitive doctors—of harping incessantly on philological quibbles, conjuring up doubts, inventing hyper-criticisms, and interposing obstructions, when the straight and level road lay before them—had got the ascendancy. The advantages of subtilizing the understanding, and sharpening the powers of perception, usually pleaded in favour of this practice, did not, by any means, outweigh its pernicious effects in disfiguring truth, so as even to render it indiscernible. Farfetched and distorted quotations, arbitrary and preposterous definitions, together with eccentric deductions, became the grand points of Talmudic excellence, and the main qualifications for rabbinical fame and preferment. To deprecate these abuses, or ridicule their absurdity, involved the risk of being held up as an illiterate clown,\* for not relishing the hocus-pocus, or of being detested and hooted as a sectarian, for exposing the quackery. A mind like

\* Em-arets.

*Mendelsohn's* must have been long disgusted at this folly; and at length he felt an irresistible impulse to warn the youth of his nation against this corrupt system, animate them to study grammar and literature methodically, and lead them in the path of rational inquiry, the only object of learning, in order that there might be, in future, fewer Talmudical mountebanks, and more solid scholars. For this salutary purpose he coalesced with a literary acquaintance, and wrote, jointly with him, a Hebrew periodical work, under the title of *Koheleth Mus-sar*, i. e. "The Moral Preacher," containing chiefly inquiries in natural history, essays on the beauties of the creation, &c. all founded on moral and ascetic aphorisms, extracted from the *Talmud* and other rabbinical writings. Of this, however, there were no more than two numbers published; as the bigots took the alarm, and trepanned the naturally timid *Mendelsohn* into a promise to drop the publication. A few grains of information were, at all events, strewn in a weedy, it is true, but not a sterile soil,

and he patiently awaited the result of some harvest, in hopes of a more propitious opportunity of becoming further useful to his people. This occurrence, trifling in itself, is interesting as an omen of *Mendelssohn's* subsequent greatness. The temper of the nation in his youth, the disposition of influential individuals to throw obstacles in the way of his imparting moral and useful knowledge to his brethren, and their drowning, by clamour and vituperation, every appeal to public judgment and feeling, would have been enough to damp the zeal of the warmest patriot, and to exact a vow, never more to interfere with so stubborn, ill-advised, and degenerate a people. Not such was the result with *Mendelssohn*. Conscious of the purity of his intentions, and cheered by the glimpse of a dawning reformation, he persevered steadily and unobtrusively in his philanthropic designs, and, at the same time, pursued his scientific and philosophical labours with redoubled energy, to enable him to check, if possible, the national cecutiency. Behold! not twenty years had elapsed, and

he had accomplished the gigantic—at that time of day *daring*—enterprise of rendering *the five books of Moses*, the *Psalms of David*, and other scriptural books, into classic and metrical German; had written and published several works on philosophy and on theoretical religion. Was there a single respectable, a singly leading voice then raised against him? No; the majority of the nation, whom he had taught to cultivate general knowledge, and appreciate method and regularity, cherished and revered him. They received the gems, with which his mighty genius enriched them, with awful amazement and boundless gratitude. As to the few querulous frogs, who were still croaking in their muddy pools, they were too contemptible to be noticed, and too fearful of his retaliation to proceed to extremities.

We are now arrived at the important period of 1744, when he became acquainted with *Lessing*, one of the most learned and enlightened men that Germany, or, indeed, any other country, ever had to boast of.\* The republic

\* For a biographical memoir of Lessing, see the Appendix to this work.

of letters has, long since, enrolled him amongst her most illustrious citizens, and in the heart of a grateful people, his name is sculptured in indelible characters. He was the first, in his days, who attempted to neutralize the virulence of religious rancour; the first, who, by the magic of his writings, succeeded in creating favourable symptoms in the German endemical distemper, the *Judeophobia*; the first, who preached liberty and equality in religion, long before these terms were abused in civil society; and, above all, the first plausible mediator between the three litigating sons of one father, the Law, the Gospel, and the Coran.\*—Lessing loved Mendelsohn for his excellent heart, and highly cultivated understanding; and Mendelsohn was no less attached to Lessing, for his inflexible consistency, and transcendent abilities. A union, founded on esteem and friendship, was thus cemented between them, which neither time nor long separation, nothing, indeed, but death could dissolve. The noble monument of their mutual affection, preserved to posterity

\* In his drama of *Nathan der Weise*.

in the latter pages of the *Morgenstunden*, will endure as long as virtue and science are cherished and cultivated amongst mankind. The benefit, which ultimately resulted to the Jewish nation, from the known intercourse of these two great and good men, is not to be calculated. That men of letters and virtuosi were occasionally to be met with, even in those days, in the drawing-rooms of opulent Jewish families, at Berlin, was accounted for, partly by the sumptuousness and munificence of the hosts, and partly by the *amiable* pretext it afforded some of those visitors, to make themselves diverting in their own circles.— But that the first author of the age, the recognised dictator of the republic of letters, who was neither a parasite nor buffoon, should court the society of an obscure Jewish private tutor, was a sign of the times, no less novel, than auspicious. They unbosomed their thoughts and feelings to each other; deplored the distance and spleen subsisting amongst fellow-creatures, from a mere diversity of speculative opinions; and blushed at the vulgar, high and low, who, blind to the page of history,

and unlessoned by the mutations of states, and the fall of empires, would not be contented with the monopoly of power and honour, and an enlarged scope of industry, but persevered in oppressing the oppressed, and taunting the afflicted Jews, by contesting even the slightest reappearance amongst them, of genius, wisdom, or judgment. Could two such men witness, daily and hourly, this disgrace on human nature, and remain supine at the melancholy condition of so numerous and available a portion of the population, dangling like a palsied limb by the body politic; knowing, as they did, that liberal usage, and proper encouragement, only were required to restore its animation, and make it subservient to the good and welfare of the whole? *Mendelsohn* now appeared before the public at large, as a temperate, but energetic advocate of his brethren, and wrote several things, to endeavour to make the nations sensible of the harsh and degrading manner in which they treated the Jews. This pursuit was, in a great measure, facilitated by the accession of *Nicolai* and of *Abbt* to the union of friendship and science,



in *Mendelsohn's* party; the former being an eminent publisher and man of letters, of *Berlin*,\* the latter, professor at the university of *Rintelen*, and a man of profound learning, who died in the prime of youth.† But let us hear *Mendelsohn*, in his preface to *Phædon*. “These dialogues,” says he, “were dedicated to my dear friend *Abbt*; but this plant was cut off in its blossom.—It was the will of God!—Short were his days on earth, but great his fame. His ‘*Essay on Merit*,’‡ is a proof of his noble mind. Posterity will be amazed at such a work by a mere youth. What exquisite fruit would this sapling still have yielded! Alas! death came, and frustrated our hopes. Germany lost a sage and an instructor; society a worthy and highly gifted member; his intimates a faithful friend; and myself an amiable fellow-traveller on the road to truth, who guarded my steps from straying.” *Nicolai* was at this time publishing

\* See biography of *Nicolai* in the Appendix to this volume.

† See biography of *Abbt*, in the Appendix to this volume.

‡ *Vom Verdienst*.

several literary reviews, and amongst them, "The Library of the Liberal Arts :"\* to which *Mendelsohn* contributed many Essays and Critiques, the elegant language and pure diction of which, so pleased both the former and *Lessing*, that they endeavoured to prevail on him to write and publish an entire work on some scientific or philosophical subject, in his own name; but his excessive modesty would not yet allow him to think of figuring as an original author, and he declined the proposition.

*Lessing* once brought to *Mendelsohn*, a work written by a celebrated character, to hear his opinion on it. Having given it a reading, he told his friend, that he deemed himself a match for the author, and would refute him. Nothing could be more welcome to *Lessing*, and he strongly encouraged the idea. Accordingly *Mendelsohn* sat down and wrote his "Philosophical Dialogues,"† on the most abstruse subjects, in which he strictly redeemed his pledge of confuting the author, though, for quietness' sake, he forbore mentioning his name, and

\* *Bibliothek der freien Künste.*

† *Philosophischen Gespraeche.*

carried the manuscript to *Lessing* for examination. "When I am at leisure," said *Lessing*, "I will peruse it." After a convenient interval, he repeated his visit, when *Lessing* kept up a miscellaneous conversation, without once mentioning the manuscript in question; and the other being too bashful to put him in mind of it, he was obliged to depart, no better informed than when he came, which was also the case at several subsequent meetings. At last, however, he mustered sufficient resolution to inquire after it, and still *Lessing* withheld his opinion. Want of leisure was pleaded as before, but *now* he would certainly read it; *Mr. Mendelsohn* might, in the mean time, take yonder small volume home with him, and let him know his thoughts on it. On opening it, *Mendelsohn* was not a little surprised to behold his own Dialogues in print. "Put it into your pocket," said *Lessing* good-naturedly, "and this Mammon along with it. It is what I got for the copy-right; it will be of service to you." *Nicolai* and *Lessing* now succeeded in persuading him to collect all his physiological lucubrations, and arrange them

for the press. They accordingly appeared, *anonymously*, under the title of “Philosophical Essays;” \* for *Mendelsohn* wished to sound the public on a work of which the author was not known: and the public soon *gave* its opinion most unequivocally by exhausting three editions in a very short time. After this, he published, jointly with *Lessing*, a little work, called “Pope a Metaphysician!” † in reply to a question proposed by the Berlin academy, as to the propriety of the concluding line of the first epistle of the Essay on Man,

“One truth is clear, *whatever is, is right* ;”

which maxim was expounded and elucidated, in a masterly manner, by the two philosophers. About this time *Lessing* went abroad, *Abbt* removed to *Rintelen*, and *Mendelsohn* and *Nicolai* remained at *Berlin*. *Mendelsohn's* fame now began to spread amongst the public, it having transpired that he was the author of the before-mentioned physiological

\* *Briefe ueber die Empfindungen.*

† *Pope, ein Metaphysiker !*

work, which had excited such an universal sensation. The object of philosophy, amongst the Germans, had been, hitherto, little more than dry reasoning, on the sifting of which by demonstrations marshalled in rank and file, the question *Cui bono?* was frequently asked in vain, since no truths, either physical or moral, were thereby elucidated. *Baumgarten* was the only one, who, by his theory of the sublime and the beautiful, gave to philosophy a new tendency, and who endeavoured, like *Socrates*, to reclaim it from barren speculation, leading it back to the phenomena of nature: showing the Germans; at the same time, by his precise exposition, that Q. E. D. is not always necessary to arrive at truth. Those phenomena of nature, *Mendelsohn* selected for the subject of his philosophical letters: he investigated the origin and gradual developement of our ideas of the beautiful, analyzed them into their first principles, and introduced into this obscure recess of the human soul, all the clearness to which he was accustomed in the school of demonstration, where he had been trained.

Further, although the theory of the beautiful, held up by him, may not perhaps altogether stand the test of severe criticism, his mode of unfolding his ideas, and of spinning out the thread to the utmost extent; the ornamental and elegant attire of the graces in which he clothed the profoundest and acutest thoughts, and the smile, as it were, *Socratic*, which he diffused all over his subject,—were nevertheless a “*novum, recens, inauditum*,” in German philosophical literature, which now beheld, for the first time, the graces ushered, by his hand, into its walk. To no German prose writer can the

“Honey flowed from the speaker’s lips,”

as Homer says of Nestor, so justly be applied as to our philosopher. Never have the mind and the heart been so jointly implicated and interested; never did truth and beauty walk so consistently and amiably together. He convinces the mind while he affects the heart; and we feel deeply interested at the same time that we are persuaded;—and if, in either of those cases, any

thing be wanting, it is supplied by the mild and pleasant diction of the speaker, whom we are tempted to believe, merely because he seems to be convinced or moved himself. There is a certain heartiness even in the *language* of conviction, when speaking of, nay demonstrating, truths great and important—an earnestness, we say, which shows in itself, as it were, a living example of a mind convinced. And in this, *Mendelsohn* had not hitherto been equalled by any of the German philosophers. None of them ever united, in writing either on God, on the beauty of virtue, or on the immortality of the soul, such profound sagacity with such intense interest.

Admitting then, that next to the profoundness of *Mendelsohn's* thoughts, the admirable skill with which he embodied and expressed them, gained him a high rank amongst the classic authors of the nation: with what inflexible industry must he have studied the German language, to be able to impart to it that inimitable mellifluence, and to accommodate it to the pleasing ductility of his most exquisite cogitations ! The more particularly,

as he belonged to a nation, to whom the two-fold idiom (Hebrew and German) to which they were accustomed from their infancy, and in which corrupt amalgama they were then educated, must have formed—as in most cases it did—a strong impediment to the attainment of a high degree of correctness of composition in either. There were many of the subsequent philosophers who attempted to imitate him; but they shared the common fate of imitators. Under their management, his beauties soon turned to blemishes; his chaste and delightful ornaments, they rendered tawdry and meretricious; and that which was in him (if we may use the simile) a natural suffusion driven to the countenance by enthusiasm and intellectual ardour, had in them all the appearance of too thick a coat of “rouge,” daubed on with a mechanical hand, prompted by a still more mechanical turn of mind.

No wonder then that the Germans, whose mind, of all European nations, is most accessible by the avenue of the heart, so highly applauded *Mendelsohn's* work, and made it a standard and favourite book in their libraries.



The learned, indeed, of every country where it became known, admired, and many adopted his hypotheses ; in the theory of *the sublime and the beautiful*, they formed their system from his model, made his work the compendium of their lectures, and the basis of their demonstrations. The grand work, “ Letters on contemporary Literature,” \* was also now revived, and continued by *Mendelsohn* and *Nicolai*, to which *Abbt* and *Lessing* contributed their share. His correspondence with *Abbt*, subsequently published, † also falls under this date. Besides being incomparable specimens of epistolary grace and beauty, these letters convey an idea of *Mendelsohn’s* vast information, his spotless virtue, and unfeigned piety. This year further added to his laurels, the award of the prize of the *Royal Academy of Berlin* for his approved solution, when even *Kant* was a competitor, of the problem given out annually, “ Are metaphysics susceptible of mathematical de-

\* *Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend.*

† *Abbt’s Vermischte Schriften, 3ter Theil; seine freundschaftliche Correspondenz enthaltend.*

monstration?"\* In addition to these literary labours, *Mendelsohn* did not cease greatly to serve individuals by his salutary advice to the numbers who consulted him about their private affairs, and the assistance he readily gave to any one who was in want of information.

In the year 1762, being thirty-three years of age, he married a daughter of *Mr. Abraham Gaugenheim*, of *Hamburgh*. The pomp of wealth, and the boast of connection, had no temptation for him; for he took no notice of some enticing overtures made to him by the best families of Berlin, who eagerly sought his alliance, but patiently awaited the destined time, when, he trusted, Providence would point out to him a cheerful, intelligent, and pious partner. Nor was he disappointed; during a temporary stay at *Hamburgh*, he became acquainted with the above-named lady, whose understanding and demeanour answering his ideas of desirable matrimonial attributes, he offered his hand and was accepted. By this amiable woman he had several children, of whom the eldest, a girl,

\* *Von der Evidenz der Metaphysischen Wissenschaften.*

died when she was eleven months old. This domestic calamity requires to be noticed, because it took place just after *Spalding* had published his fine work "On the Destination of Man,"\* which *Abbt* attacked in his "Doubts on the Destination of Man."† *Mendelsohn* took *Spalding's* part against *Abbt*, and defended the correctness and purity of the principles of the former. Pending this discussion, the child died, and *Mendelsohn* thus wrote to *Abbt*:‡ "Within the last few days I have been obliged to forego the pleasure of writing to you, and to suspend our discussion on the destiny of man. I am still plunged in the deepest affliction caused by the death of my first-born child, a girl eleven months old. I have nevertheless reason to give thanks to God for the happy and serene existence she enjoyed during her evanescent abode here,

\* *Ueber die Bestimmung des Menschen.*

† *Zweifel ueber die Bestimmung des Menschen.*

‡ The letter printed in the correspondence, under the title of "Oracle," and of which it is doubtful whether any other country can produce the equal.

when she gave us hopes of future exultation. Do not, however, imagine, my friend, that this delicate floweret was made to flit through this world for no wise purpose, like an ethereal vision, which is now before us, and then is seen no more. No; she had already accomplished various designs here. Many were the tokens of her Creator's infinite wisdom which she manifested to the intelligent observer. From a babe, scarcely more than vegetating, her eye was observant; she soon gave evident proofs of memory and recognition; smiles of complacency hovered on her lips, and lo! the intellectual being! As we observe the lily which gently grows, then expands, and exhibits its simple beauties, so plainly did we see in this infant those emotions of soul which distinguish man from the brute creation; such as compassion, impatience, surprise, and reflection, displaying themselves gradually in her looks and gestures: she increased, from day to day, in intelligence, and became richer in contrivances to convey her thoughts to others." By this he alluded to the destination which

the Almighty has given to man, whom he has made capable of progressive perfection; to the successive gradations of improvement in ascending life; to the unlimited scope of the mind, and probably also to the moral obligation of striving to reach the highest possible degree of perfection, and to fulfil the end of our creation, in the respective stations in which Providence has placed us.

Wrought upon by his important discussion with *Abbt*, *Mendelsohn* next betook himself to translate *Plato's Phædon* from the Greek into German, and to add to it all the proofs of the immortality of the soul, and the destination of man in a future state, that could be collected or suggested. He published the work under the title of "*Phædon*, or, On the Immortality of the Soul."\* It consists of three parts, in the form of conversations between *Socrates* and his friends. There is a happy—not a profane—parody, if we may so call it, in *Mr. David Friedlander's* preface to "*Hanephesh*," i. e. "On the Soul," a posthumous Hebrew work of

\* *Phædon, oder ueber die Unsterblichkeit der Seele.*

*Mendelsohn's*, edited by that gentleman. It runs thus:—"Moses (*Mendelsohn*) spake, and *Socrates* was to him even as a mouth,\* into which he put all his questions and answers, not as that ancient sage delivered them, at the time, but as they sprang up in the modern philosopher's mind, and were sanctioned by his judgment." Few works were ever crowned with such great and deserved success. Written in most classical, though apparently popular style—a talent which *Mendelsohn* possessed in an eminent degree—it was read by the fashionable, as well as by the learned world, with pleasure and advantage. In less than two years, it went through three large German editions, was translated into the English, French, Dutch, Italian, Danish, and Hebrew languages, and established the author's fame on a large portion of the civilized globe.

Such a brilliant constellation had not been seen on the Jewish horizon, since the twelfth century, the days of the great *Maimonides*. Not but that the nation had to boast, in every

\* Exod. iv. 15, 16.

age and country, of wise and eminent men, who would have been ornaments to society at large, had they turned their minds to profane as well as sacred learning: but as, with the exception of a few poets and mathematicians, they devoted most of their time to commenting on Scripture, and to Talmudic disquisitions; and as they wrote exclusively in Hebrew, and that mostly rabbinical, their writings, however excellent of their kind, did not circulate farther than the community for which they were intended, to which only they could be of practical utility, and which was the only competent judge of their merits. Of Jewish authors who have, in that long interval, acquired general celebrity, we know only three: *Manasseh ben Israel*, the contemporary and friend of *Hugo Grotius*, and the favourite of *Oliver Cromwell*;\* the major part of whose works, too, are theological, Talmudic, and written in the Hebrew, Arabic, Latin, and Spanish tongues. *Benedict Spinoza*, a man

\* Bibliothèque Judaique, Art. Angleterre. Gregorio Letti. Life of Oliver Cromwell, vol. ii. p. 125. Bishop Burnet's History of his Times.

of a gigantic intellect, and incorruptible principles, wrote in Latin, and far above the meridian of the Jews of his days. They detested his doctrine, and—glorious times!—excommunicated him as an atheist. Little, however, did he deserve this rigour at their hands; for he subsequently declined the most tempting offers to embrace Christianity, and rather maintained himself, penuriously, through the remainder of his life, by grinding spectacle-glasses. *Orobio* has left us nothing but his interesting controversy with *Limborch*. It may be as well to mention, by the way, that *M. ben Israel* was of a distinguished family of clandestine Jews, at Lisbon, who emigrated to Holland, as did many of the first nobility, and even clergy, in the same predicament, to avoid the tender mercies of the holy inquisition, and spare that benevolent institution the trouble of saving their souls by roasting their bodies. *Spinoza*, also, and *Orobio* were respectably descended; and all the three above-named, belonged to the Portuguese community of *Amsterdam*, which was, at that time, infinitely superior, in consequence, education,



manners, and institutions, to their German brethren. After such a chasm, when the ideas of a "classical Jew," an "elegant Israelitish scholar," a "philosophical rabbi," were likened, with an incredulous smile, to those whimsical and grotesque combinations of heterogeneous things, with which the designer and the painter sometimes amuse themselves and the public; *Mendelsohn*, who united in himself all those qualities, who, moreover, not only wrote his native language fluently and correctly, but imparted to it a grace and energy which it never had before—*Mendelsohn*, we say, could not but appear an amazing prodigy to his contemporaries. The learned, in particular, were puzzled how to square his notorious Mosaic orthodoxy with his habitual liberality of expression; his pertinacious seclusion with his undeniable claims to distinction; and his resignation to his lot with the hinted facility of improving it. A professorship at one of the universities, and perhaps the honorary title of "aulic counsellor," so cheap in Germany, would have been, under certain circumstances, no surprising revolu-

tion at all in his temporal affairs.—We do not mean to insinuate, that the example of a neighbouring state—where a pious, and, no doubt, well-meaning princess, had been ridding the Jewish communities, under her protection, of some spendthrifts, reprobates, and starvelings, by the lures of paltry offices and miniature sinecures—was deemed worthy of imitation by an enlightened government like the Prussian, in the reign of *Frederic II.*, the friend of religious toleration and liberty of conscience. *Frederic* had no great opinion either of deserters or of apostates. When his regiments had their complement, no further recruiting or kidnapping was allowed in his dominions. No; not even for the kingdom of heaven. And as for those depôts of renegadoes, those nurseries of temporal recklessness and final remorse, so much the toy, the tool, and the fashion elsewhere, it does not appear that, amongst the number of useful institutions, public and private, formed under his auspices, there was a single one of this description.—These speculations on *Mendelsohn's* views and secret policy, naturally revived the recol

lection of the miscarriage with *Spinoza*. However habitually indifferent, nay, jocular, at the conversion of an *ordinary* person, that of a *philosopher* was considered by the scholar, as the triumph of learning; by the puritan, as the influence of grace; and by those who had been frequently predicting it, as a proof of their uncommon sagacity. His enviers—of which, like all great men, he had a tolerable share—were not sparing with inuendoes upon his hypocrisy, his national shrewdness, and his patient watching for a convenient opportunity to throw off the cumbersome mask. This might, or might not be so; to bring the matter to a tangible shape, remained, nevertheless, for some time, a knotty point with the German literati. *Johann Casper Lavater*,\* a most amiable, but rather overzealous protestant minister of *Zurich*, in Switzerland, an old acquaintance of *Mendelsohn's*, at length broke the ice. He had been translating “*Bonnet's Inquiry into the Evidences of Christianity*,” from the French into the

\* See the biography of Lavater, in the Appendix to this work.

German, and published it, with the following dedication to *Moses Mendelsohn*,

“ Dear Sir,

“ I think I cannot give you a stronger proof of my admiration of your excellent writings, and of your still more excellent character, that of *an Israelite in whom there is no guile*; nor offer you a better requital for the great gratification which I have, some years ago, enjoyed in your interesting society, than by dedicating to you the ablest philosophical inquiry into the evidences of Christianity that I am acquainted with.

“ I am fully conscious of your profound judgment, steadfast love of truth, literary independence, enthusiasm for philosophy in general, and esteem for *Bonnet's* works in particular. The amiable discretion with which, notwithstanding your contrariety to the christian religion, you delivered your opinion on it, is still fresh in my memory. And so indelible and important is the impression, which your truly *philosophical respect* for the

*moral* character of its Founder made on me, in one of the happiest moments of my existence, that I venture to beseech you—nay, before the God of truth, your and my creator and father, I beseech and conjure you—to read this work, I will not say, with philosophical impartiality, which I am confident will be the case, but for the purpose of publicly refuting it, in case you should find the *main* arguments, in support of the facts of Christianity, untenable; or, should you find them conclusive, with the determination of doing what policy, love of truth, and probity demand—what *Socrates* would doubtless have done, had *he* read the work, and found it unanswerable.

“May God still cause much truth and virtue to be disseminated by your means; and make you experience the happiness my whole heart wishes you. ~

“JOHANN CASPER LAVATER.

“Zurich, 25th August, 1769.”

When this address first met *Mendelsohn's* eye, he was greatly struck by the snare seemingly laid for him, and not a little perplexed

as to the means of frustrating it. The alternative was strangely critical. He must either fall in with *Bonnet's* arguments, and acknowledge the soundness of his doctrine, or refute them, and expose its inconsistency. The former would imply indifference to his own faith, whereas the latter must infallibly incense the clergy of all denominations, and produce vexatious consequences to himself, and to all his brethren scattered through Christendom. To equivocate or qualify, was against his principles, and would have surely endangered, if not destroyed, the unbounded veneration and honourable influence which he enjoyed amongst his own sect, who would have looked upon the least compromise, in fundamental points of religion, as a monstrous anomaly, and alarming precedent. Absolute silence might incur the imputation of contempt of so celebrated and universally esteemed a man as *Lavater*, or, of a pusillanimous evasion of his challenge, or, what was worse—and there were not a few of that opinion—of disguised deism. As if to aggravate this dilemma, the disagreeable news had reached *Mendelsohn*

just after his being taken ill, and when he was confined to his bed, and unfit for any mental exertion. But this was a case which, with him, superseded all secondary considerations. He rallied his retreating spirits, brought the whole reserve of his faculties into action, and was—to use a chivalrous phrase—determined to conquer or die. Meanwhile the public, and the learned world in particular, were on the alert, and anticipated various results. His friends, though perfectly easy as to his reputation and consistency, could not divest themselves of their fear, lest the more than probable issue should subject him ultimately to the unceremonious behaviour of baffled wags and pert collegians, who talked of nothing but *Mendelsohn's* being about to shave off his beard, and turn Christian. *Lavater's* party, more dignified, but not less sanguine, already hailed the hour when the Hebrew sage could be admitted, *with propriety*, to their *soirées*. The Muses were invoked for odes and sonnets, the Graces for tasteful patterns for purses, *souvenirs*, and snuffboxes, and the saints for blessings, for and on the undoubted victor,

“ ’twas silence all,  
“ And pleasing expectation,”

when the following letter of *Mendelsohn's* appeared before the public.

“ Honoured philanthropist,

“ You were pleased to dedicate to me, your translation from the French of *Bonnet's Inquiry into the Evidences of the Christian Religion*; and most publicly and solemnly to conjure me, *to refute that work, in case I should find the main arguments in support of the facts of Christianity untenable; but, should I find them conclusive, to do, what policy, love of truth, and probity bid me, what Socrates would have done, had he read the work, and found it unanswerable.—*

Which, I suppose, means, to renounce the religion of my fathers, and embrace that which *Mr. Bonnet* vindicates. Now, were I ever mean-spirited enough, to balance love of truth and probity against policy, I assure you I should, in this instance, throw them all three into the same scale.

“ I should deem myself beneath a worthy



man's notice, did I not acknowledge, with a grateful heart, the friendship and kindness you manifest for me in that dedication, which I am fully persuaded flowed from a pure source, and cannot be ascribed to any but benevolent and philanthropic motives. Yet I must own, that it appeared to me exceedingly strange; and I should have expected any thing, rather than a *public* challenge from a man like *Lavater*.

“It seems you still recollect the confidential conversation I had the pleasure of holding with yourself and your worthy friends in my apartment. Can you then possibly have forgotten, how frequently I sought to divert the discourse from religious, to more neutral topics, and how much yourself and your friends had to urge me, before I would venture to deliver my opinion on a subject of such vital importance? If I am not mistaken, preliminary assurances were even given, that no *public use* should *ever* be made, of any remarkable expression that might drop on the occasion. Be that as it may; I will rather suppose myself in error, than tax you with a breach of

promise. But as I so sedulously sought to avoid an explanation in my own apartment, amidst a small number of worthy men, of whose good intentions I had every reason to be persuaded, it might have been reasonably inferred that a *public one* would be extremely repugnant to my disposition; and that I must have inevitably become the *more* embarrassed, when the voice demanding it happened to be entitled to an answer at any rate. What then, sir, could induce you to single *me* thus, against my well-known disinclination, out of the many, and force me into a *public arena*, which I so much wished never to have occasion to enter? —If even you placed my reserve to the score of mere timidity and bashfulness, these very *foibles* would have deserved the moderation and forbearance of a charitable heart.

“ But my scruples of engaging in religious controversy, never proceeded from timidity or bashfulness. Let me assure you, that it was not only *from the other day*, that I began searching into my religion. No; I became very timely sensible of the duty of putting my actions and opinions to a test. That I

have from my early youth devoted my hours of repose and relaxation to philosophy and the arts and sciences, was done for the sole purpose of qualifying myself for this important investigation. What other motives could I have had? In the situation I was then in, *not the least temporal benefit was to be expected from the sciences.* I knew very well, *that I had no chance of getting forward in the world through them.* And as to the gratification they might afford me—alas! much esteemed philanthropist! the station allotted to my brethren in the faith, in civil society, is so incompatible with the expansion of the mind, *that we certainly do not increase our happiness by learning to view the rights of humanity under their true aspect.*—On this point, too, I must decline saying any more. He that is acquainted with our condition, and has a humane heart, will here feel more than I dare to express.

“If, after so many years of investigation, the decision of my mind had not been completely in favour of my religion, it would infallibly have become known through my

public conduct. I do not conceive what should rivet me to a religion, to appearance so excessively severe, and so commonly exploded, if I were not convinced in my heart of its truth. Let the result of my investigation have been what it may, so soon as I discovered the religion of my fathers *not* to be the *true* one, I must, of course, have discarded it. Indeed, were I convinced in my heart of *another* religion being true, there could not, in my opinion, be a more flagitious depravity, than to refuse homage to truth, in defiance of internal evidence. What should entice me to such depravity? Have I not already declared, that in this instance, policy, love of truth, and probity, would lead me to steer the *same* course?

“ Were I indifferent to *both* religions, or derided and scorned, in my mind, revelation in general, I should know well enough what policy suggests, when conscience remains neutral. What is there to deter me? Fear of my brethren in the faith? Their temporal power is too much curtailed to daunt me.—What then? Obstinacy? indolence? a pre-

dilection for habitual notions?—Having devoted the greatest portion of my life to the investigation, I may be supposed to possess sufficient good sense, not to sacrifice the fruit of my labours to such frivolities.

“ Thus you see, sir, that, but for a sincere conviction of my religion, the result of my theological investigations would have been sealed by a public act of mine. Whereas, on the contrary, they have *strengthened* me in the faith of my fathers; still I could wish to move on quietly without rendering the public an account of the state of my mind. I do not mean to deny that I have detected in my religion human additions and base alloy, which, alas! but too much tarnish its pristine lustre. But where is the friend of truth that can boast of having found *his* religion free from similar corruptions? We all, who go in search of truth, are annoyed by the pestilential vapour of hypocrisy and superstition, and wish we could wipe it off without defacing what is really good and true. Yet of the *essentials* of my religion I am as firmly, as irrefragably convinced, as

you, sir, or *Mr. Bonnet*, ever can be of those of yours. And I herewith declare in the presence of the God of truth, your and my creator and supporter, by whom you have conjured me in your dedication, that *I will adhere to my principles so long as my entire soul does not assume another nature.* My contrariety to your creed, which I expressed to yourself and to your friends, has since, in no respect, changed. And as to my veneration for the moral character of its founder! had you not omitted the reservations which I so distinctly annexed to it, I should concede as much now.—We must finish certain inquiries once in our life, if we wish to proceed further. This, I may say, I had done, with regard to religion, several years ago. I read, compared, reflected, and—made up my mind.

“ Yet, for what I cared, Judaism might have been hurled down in every polemical compendium, and triumphantly sneered at in every academic exercise, and I would not have entered into a dispute about it. Rabbinical scholars, and rabbinical smat-

terers, might have grubbed in obsolete scribblings, which no sensible Jew reads or knows of, and amused the public with the most fantastic ideas of Judaism, without so much as a contradiction on my part. It is by virtue that I wish to shame the opprobrious opinion commonly entertained of a Jew, and not by controversial writings. My religious tenets, philosophy, station in civil society, all furnish me with the most cogent reason for abstaining from theological disputes, and for treating in my publications of those truths only which are equally important to *all persuasions*.

“ Pursuant to the principles of my religion, I am not to seek to convert any one who is not born according to our laws. This proneness to conversion, the origin of which some would fain tack on the Jewish religion, is, nevertheless, diametrically opposed to it. Our rabbins unanimously teach, that the written and oral laws, which form conjointly our revealed religion, are obligatory on our nation only. ‘ Moses commanded us a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of

Jacob.\* We believe that all other nations of the earth have been directed by God to adhere to the laws of nature, and to the religion of the patriarchs.† Those who regulate their lives according to the precepts of this religion of nature and of reason, are called *virtuous men of other nations*,‡ and are the children of eternal salvation.§

“ Our rabbins are so remote from *Proselytomania*, that they enjoin us to dissuade, by forcible remonstrances, every one who comes forward to be converted.|| We are to lead him to reflect that, by such a step, he is subjecting himself needlessly to a most onerous burthen ; that, in his present condition, he has only to observe the precepts of a *Noachide*, to be saved ; but the moment he embraces the religion of the Israelites, he subscribes gratuitously to

\* Deuteron. xxx. 4. Talmud Sanhedrim, folio 59. Maimonides on the Book of Kings, cap. 8. sec. 10.

† See notes in Appendix.

‡ Appendix.

§ Appendix.

|| The Talmud says somewhere, נרים לישראל כספחה, i. e. proselytes are annoying to Israel like a scab.



all the rigid rites of that faith, to which he must then strictly conform, or await the punishment which the legislator has denounced on their infraction. Finally, we are to hold up to him a faithful picture of the misery, tribulation, and obloquy, in which the nation is now living, in order to guard him from a rash act, which he might ultimately repent.\*

“Thus, you see, the religion of my fathers *does not wish* to be extended. We are *not* to send missions to both the Indies, or to Greenland, to preach our doctrine to those remote people. The latter, in particular, who, by all accounts, observe the laws of nature stricter than, alas ! we do, are, in our religious estimation, an *enviable* race. Whoever is not born conformable to our laws, has no occasion to live according to them. We alone consider ourselves bound to acknowledge their authority ; and this can give no offence to our neighbours. Let our notions be held ever so absurd, still there is no need to cavil about them, and others are certainly at liberty to question the validity of laws, to which they

\* Maimonides of forbidden marriages, cap. 13. sec. 14. cap. 14. sec. 1.

are, by our own admission; not amenable;—but whether they are acting manly; socially, and charitably, in ridiculing these laws, must be left to their consciences. So long as we do not tamper with *their* opinions, wrangling serves no purpose whatsoever.

“Suppose there were amongst my contemporaries, a *Confucius* or a *Solon*, I could, consistently with my religious principles, love and admire the great man, but I should never hit on the extravagant idea of converting a *Confucius* or a *Solon*. What should I convert him for? As he does not belong to the *congregation of Jacob*, my religious laws were not legislated for him; and on *doctrines* we should soon come to an understanding. Do I think there is a chance of his being saved?—I certainly believe, that he, who leads mankind on to virtue in this world, cannot be damned in the next. And I need not *now* stand in awe of any reverend college, that would call me to account for this opinion, as the *Sorbonne* did honest *Marmontel*.

“I am so fortunate, as to count amongst my friends, many a worthy man, who is not of my faith. We love each other sincerely,

notwithstanding, we presume, or take for granted, that, in matters of belief, we differ widely in opinion. I enjoy the delight of their society, which both improves and solaces me. Never yet has my heart whispered, "Alas! for this excellent man's soul!"—He, who believes, that no salvation is to be found out of the pale of his own church, must often feel such sighs rise in his bosom.

"It is true, every man is naturally bound to diffuse knowledge and virtue amongst his fellow-creatures, and to eradicate error and prejudice as much as lies in his power. It might therefore be concluded, that it is a duty, publicly to fling the gauntlet at every religious opinion, which one deems erroneous. But all prejudices are not equally noxious. Certainly, there are some, which strike directly at the happiness of the human race; their effect on morality is obviously deleterious, and we cannot expect even a *casual* benefit from them. These must be unhesitatingly assailed by the philanthropist. To grapple with them, at once, is indisputably the best mode, and all delay, from circuitous measures, unwarrantable. Of this kind are those errors and pre-

judices which disturb man's own, and his fellow-creatures' peace and happiness, and canker, in youth, the germ of benevolence and virtue, before it can shoot forth. Fanaticism, ill-will, and a spirit of persecution, on the one side; levity, Epicurism, and boasting infidelity, on the other.

“ Yet the opinions of my fellow-creatures, erroneous as they may appear to *my* conviction, do sometimes belong to the higher order of theoretical principles, and are too remote from practice, to become immediately pernicious; they constitute, however, from their generality, the basis, on which the people who entertain them have raised their system of morality and social order; and so they have casually become of great importance to that portion of mankind. To attack such dogmas openly, because they appear prejudices, would be like sapping the foundation of an edifice, for the purpose of examining its soundness and stability, without first securing the superstructure against a total downfall. He who values the welfare of mankind more than his own fame, will bridle his tongue on prejudices of this description, and beware of seeking to

reform them prematurely and precipitately, lest he should upset, what *he* thinks a defective theory of morality, before his fellow-creatures are firm in the perfect one, which he means to substitute.

“Therefore, there is nothing inconsistent in my *thinking myself bound* to remain neutral, under the impression of having detected national prejudices and religious errors amongst my fellow-citizens. Provided these errors and prejudices do not subvert, directly, either their religion or the laws of nature, and that they have a tendency to promote, *casually*, that which is good and desirable. The morality of our actions, when founded in error, it is true, scarcely deserves that name; and the advancement of virtue will be always more efficaciously and permanently effected through the medium of truth, *where truth is known*, than through that of prejudice or error. But where truth is *not* known, where it has *not* become national, so as to operate as powerfully on the bulk of the people as deep-rooted prejudice—there *prejudice* will be held almost sacred by every votary of virtue.

“How much more imperative, then, does

this discretion become, when the nation, which, in our opinion, fosters such prejudices, has rendered itself otherwise estimable through wisdom and virtue; when it contains numbers of eminent men, who rank with the benefactors of mankind. The human errors of such a noble portion of our species, ought to be differentially overlooked by one, who is liable to the same; he should dwell on its excellencies only, and not insidiously prowl to pounce upon it, where he conceives it to be vulnerable.

“These are the reasons which my religion and my philosophy suggest to me, for scrupulously avoiding polemical controversy. Add to them, my local relations to my fellow-citizens, and you cannot but justify me. I am one of an oppressed people, who have to supplicate shelter and protection of the ascendant nations; and these boons they do not obtain every where, indeed nowhere, without more or less of restriction.\* Rights granted to every other human being, my brethren in the faith willingly forego, contented with being tole-

\* Justice and gratitude require to observe, that this was written in the middle of the last century. *Enlightened Europe* presents, in our days, but one state to verify it.

rated and protected; and they account it no trifling favour, on the part of the nation, who takes them in on bearable terms, since, in some places, even a *temporary domicile is denied them*. Do the laws of *Zurich* allow your circumcised friend to pay you a visit there? No.—What gratitude then do not my brethren owe to the nation, which includes them in its general philanthropy, suffering them, without molestation, to worship the Supreme Being after the rites of their ancestors? The government under which I live, leaves nothing to wish for in this respect; and the Hebrews should therefore be scrupulous in abstaining from reflections on the predominant religion, or, which is the same thing, in touching their protectors, where men of virtue are most tender.

“By those principles, I have resolved invariably to regulate my conduct; unless extraordinary inducements should compel me to deviate from them. Private appeals, from men of worth, I have taken the liberty tacitly to decline. The importunities of pedants, who arrogated to themselves the right of worrying

me publicly, on account of my religious principles, I conceived myself justified in treating with contempt. But the solemn conjuration of a *Lavater*, demands, at any rate, this public avowal of my sentiments : lest too pertinacious a silence should be construed into *disregard*, or—into *acquiescence*.

“I have read, with attention, your translation of *Bonnet's* work. After what I have already stated, conviction becomes, of course, foreign to the question : but, even considered abstractedly, as an apology of the christian religion, I must own, it does not appear to me to possess that merit which you attach to it. I know *Mr. Bonnet*, from other works, as an excellent author ; but I have read many vindications of the same religion, I will not only say by English writers, but by our own German countrymen, which I thought much more recondite and philosophical, than that by *Bonnet*, which you are recommending for my conversion. If I am not mistaken, most of your friend's hypotheses are even of German growth ; for the author of the *Essai de Psychologie*, to whom *Mr. Bonnet* cleaves so



firmly, owes almost every thing to German philosophers. In the matter of philosophical principles, a German has seldom occasion to borrow of his neighbours.

“Nor are the general reflections, premised by the author, in my judgment, the most profound part of the work ; at least the application and use which he makes of them, for the vindication of his religion, appear to me so unstable and arbitrary, that I scarcely can trace *Bonnet* in them. It is unpleasant, that my opinion happens to be so much at variance with yours ; but I am inclined to think, that *Bonnet's* internal conviction, and laudable zeal for his religion, have given to himself a cogency in his arguments, which, for my own part, I cannot discover in them. The major part of his *consequents* flow so vaguely from the *antecedents*, that I am confident I could vindicate *any religion*, by the same ratiocination. After all, this may not be the author's fault ; he could have written for those only who are convinced like himself, and who read, merely to *fortify* themselves in their belief. . . . .  
*When an author once agrees with his readers*

*about the result, they will not fall out about the argument.* But at you, sir, I may well be astonished: that *you* should deem that work adequate to convince a man, who, from his principles, cannot but be prepossessed in favour of its reverse. It was probably impossible for you to identify the thoughts of a person, like me, who is not furnished with conviction, but has to seek it. But if you *have* done so, and believe, notwithstanding, what you have intimated, that *Socrates* himself would have found *Mr. Bonnet's* arguments unanswerable, one of us is, certainly, a remarkable instance of the dominion of prejudice and education, even over those who go, with an upright heart, in search of truth.

“I have now stated to you the reasons why I so earnestly wish to have no more to do with religious controversy; but I have given you, at the same time to understand, that I could, very easily, bring forward something in refutation of *Mr. Bonnet's* work. If you should prove peremptory, I *must* lay aside my scruples, and come to a resolution of publishing, in a *counter-inquiry*, my thoughts,

both on *Mr. Bonnet's* work, and on the cause which he vindicates. But, I hope you will exonerate me from this irksome task, and rather give me leave to withdraw to that state of quietude, which is more congenial to my disposition. Place yourself in my situation; take my view of circumstances, not yours, and you will no longer strive against my reluctance. I should be sorry to be led into the temptation of breaking through those boundaries, which I have, after such mature deliberation, marked out to myself.

“ I am, with most perfect respect,

“ yours sincerely,

“ MOSES MENDELSON.

“ Berlin,  
the 12th of December, 1769.”

That this letter had the desired effect, in making *Lavater* sensible of his premature zeal, is manifest from the following answer, which appeared in public, very soon after :

“ Honoured Sir,

“ I did take the liberty of requesting you, before the public, to refute *Mr. Bonnet's*

*Inquiry into the Evidences of Christianity*: or to do, what *Socrates* would have done, had *he* found that work, in the main, unanswerable.

“It shall be no secret to you, that this step, at which you are so much surprised, is thought hasty by most of my friends; particularly so by those abroad, amongst whom *Mr. Bonnet* himself greatly disapproves of it. However, it was past remedy. The *Leipsig* fair\* being so very near at hand, I had no time to consult my distant connections. Further, I am not unwilling to own, that I am by no means indifferent to my friends’ opinions on this subject, and that I had been desirous, even before I received your kind letter, to relieve you from the embarrassment in which I had placed you.

“Still, I could not regret, entirely, what had passed; and even now, amidst the varying opinion of the public, and with your letter before me, I think I have no reason for doing so. I am only now becoming aware, that I

\* At Michaelmas, when most new works are published by the German booksellers.

might have, perhaps, gained my end easier in another way, and saved you all this vexation.

“My object was, not to elicit from you a confession of faith, but to render the cause of Christianity—which concerns me so much, and which I think so ably defended by *Mr. Bonnet*—a service, in my opinion, far more material, than merely translating his work. I was in hopes of prevailing upon you to *scrutinize* it. A scrutiny which must have thrown the brightest light on *truth*, or, at least, on what I conceive such.

“It is plain I should have been more successful, and so would the public, if I had solicited your opinion of *Bonnet's* philosophy, as applied to the christian faith, in a private letter; and if I dedicated the work to you at all, the *dedication* ought to have been written *quite* differently, when the inquiries of one *philosopher* are submitted to the investigation of *another*.

“Your obliging letter corroborates my friends' opinions, and convinces me that I have erred.—You give me credit for good intentions; but, at the same time, point out

to me, not only the reasons I ought to have listened to myself, but also those, which I should have anticipated, *on your part*. Reasons, by which you consider yourself justified neither to *admit*, nor to *refute*, any thing before the public. Reasons, which *you* are not at all bound to state.

“ This makes me think, that a detail of the reasons which led *me* to this step, will not go far in my defence. With those who know you as a philosopher, they might, generally, excuse my solicitude to have *Bonnet's* work scrutinized by you. They might show, that every one *exactly* in my situation, would have deemed it a duty, or would, at all events, have felt a strong *moral* impulse to be urgent with you on the importance of this scrutiny, though they do not extenuate the importunity and peremptoriness of my challenge.

“ That I could not have addressed myself to a fitter person, I am, friend of truth, now more convinced of than ever ; had I but contented myself with submitting this part of *Bonnet's* philosophy for the sake of general utility, to your, a philosopher's uncompromising

judgment. I find we agree on the importance of applying philosophy to revelation, and that nothing seems of more importance to you than this application. ‘*It is not since the other day,*’ you write, ‘*that you have searched into your faith. You became very early sensible of the duty of putting it to the test ; and have devoted your leisure and hours of relaxation to philosophy and the liberal arts and sciences, merely with a view of preparing yourself for this essential trial.*’ Indeed, my honoured friend, you are the man to whom, of all others, I long to be allowed to apply, in order to profit by his inquiries, and to expose mine to his severest investigation.

“ Nevertheless, when I took it for granted, that an inquiry into religion must be of equal consequence to you as to myself, I ought properly to have considered whether the duty which enjoins the *examination* and *confession* of religion does also impose the obligation of religious *controversy*. By so doing, I might have hit, at least, on some of the reasons by which you show that *you* are not under such an obligation, and that *I* have

been premature in challenging you in this solemn and peremptory manner. And even if those reasons had not satisfied me at once, our not having yet agreed on the *importance* of an inquiry into *Christianity*, ought to have been sufficient to deter me.

“ Consequently, I retract my peremptory challenge, in which I was, not sufficiently warranted. And here, before the public, I entreat you to forgive whatever is *importunate*, whatever is *improper*, in my dedication.

“ In the most implicit confidence that you will accept of this apology, I further venture candidly to impart to you my thoughts on some parts of your letter, and to disclose, at the same time, the wishes of my heart.

“ It would pain me exceedingly if you had, from mere complaisance or charitable feeling, quashed the charge, *that I have acted in defiance of a promise*. Can you, man of integrity as you are, suffer the public to harbour the slightest supposition that the *manner in which* I alluded to our conversation was a breach of promise? *that*



*the use I made of it was indiscreet, and tending to your prejudice?*—Is it possible you can think me capable of such a total want of prudence, as to lay myself open to a reproach of that sort under the least impression of deserving it? I should indeed feel sensibly hurt at any unpleasantness I may have inadvertently caused you through not having placed myself sufficiently in your situation; and, in that case, I should pray God to avert from you all the vexatious consequences of my hastiness.—As that conversation was the primary inducement to my *dedication*, I thought it quite natural, quite innocent, when I wrote the latter, to refer in *general terms* to the former.

“ But that, on speaking of your *veneration of the moral character of the founder of my religion*, I have omitted the reservations which you distinctly annexed; that, be assured, my friend, was not duplicity.—Did I insinuate this veneration of yours to have been *unreserved*? Why, I have not even made use of the term *veneration*, I spoke of mere *respect*, by no means of *religious*—for

then I should have said that which is not true—but of *philosophical* respect; which word, as well as that of *moral*, I caused designedly to be printed in a conspicuous type. Immediately preceding this, we have the sentence, ‘*Notwithstanding your contrariety to Christianity.*’ Every reasonable reader\* must instantly perceive, that your respect was not *without its provisoes*; that it was very limited, and every thing but *religious*. To be sure, I might have expressed myself somewhat plainer; and now I find I actually ought to have done so: *though the chance of being reminded by you of the neglect of my promise would perhaps have equally existed.*

“I should be guilty of wronging the noblest of minds did I suppose that, after a declaration like this, you could still deem the omission intentional and immoral. If I

\* “The least turn given to my expressions throws a false light on my opinions, in which conscience will not approve of their going abroad.” So says *Mendelssohn* to unfair reviewers. I find it highly necessary to repeat the same to my readers in general, both on his behalf and on my own.—*Lavater.*

am not mistaken, your respect for the founder of my religion was attended by the following emphatic clause: ‘*If he had not accepted of the homage which is due to the Most-High only!*’\* If it was another, you will please to substitute it.

“ You wonder, my dear sir, that I should deem *Bonnet’s* work sufficient to convince *you*. It is not improbable that, in weighing the proofs in my original, I have been biassed by my own conviction of the divine origin of my religion. It may be, that I think them stronger than they really are; stronger than they are, perhaps, thought by that modest philosopher himself, whose principal object in promulgating them was certainly not the conviction of readers of your *faith*. And let us suppose that I had actually imagined to have met in the work with some chasms, some rather weak points, might they not have seemed to me of that kind, which you, an expert logician, would easily be able

\* In the original: “*Wenn er sich die Ehre der Anbethung, die dem einigen Jehovah gebuehrt, nicht angemaszt haette!*”

to supply, and find the *main* argument conclusive notwithstanding? I obviously interested myself for an inquiry into the evidence of the *facts* only of Christianity, as weighed by *Mr. Bonnet*. I did not say a word of the *doctrine*. To have its *history* investigated by an *impartial philosopher* was all I wished for at the moment. But what I certainly could not conceive, and what still remains inexplicable to me is, how *you*, firmly convinced as you are of the *essentials* of *your* faith, can be so confident of being able to vindicate *any faith one pleases*, by the same reasoning by which *Mr. Bonnet* proves the truth of his own?

“ You are perfectly ingenuous; permit me to be so too. In this your very depreciating judgment of *Bonnet's* work, I rather miss the *philosopher Mendelsohn*. I may be mistaken; but this most condemning tone is obviously carried to a greater length than the object of your letter seems to require; than one would have expected indeed of a believer in *revelation*; so that, let the matter be viewed whichever way it may,

I cannot well consider you otherwise than as a man strongly *prejudiced* for his religion.

“*You confess the religion of your fathers an apparently over-severe, and commonly exploded religion—you are convinced in your heart of its truth!* Thus you lend your faith to a *revealed* religion! You are far from *deriding* or *contemning* revelation in general—and yet your entire soul must assume another nature before you could become a *Christian*.—Of these extraordinary results of your reason I am now perfectly satisfied. I think them singular beyond expression, but they do not dismay me much.—The staunchest advocate of Christianity was, at least, at one time, as contrary to Christianity as you can possibly be. Sure enough his entire soul *did* assume another nature. A phenomenon, the *historical credibility* of which you can hardly call into question, though you, in particular, must maintain the impracticability of accounting for it by *natural physiological* causes. For whom must the *natural* impossibility of the abrupt transition of the most

*inveterate* persecutor of Christianity to its most faithful, most zealous, most valiant *champion*, strike more forcibly than *you*, who have no wish to refute Christianity; who are infinitely remote from the spirit of persecution; than you, in whom exuberate sentiments most noble, philanthropic, and exalted towards Christians, let them, to the eternal disgrace of their own religion and of human nature, trample ever so contumeliously on the most sacred duties towards your nation, whom they ought, on so many accounts, to hold in veneration—and yet you think it morally impossible to become a Christian? Let us balance the *historical facts* and the *intrinsic beauties* of both religions—*Moses* and *Jesus*—the *decatalogue* and the *sermon on the mount*—the *prophets* and the *apostles*—the distance and the state of the respective ages—the more or less interrupted succession of witnesses, and of written or other monuments. I will say no more.—May I be so unfortunate as to learn the *philosophical* grounds on which *you* maintain the divinity of the *Mosaic* religion! They would solve

what is, as yet, to me, an impenetrable mystery; I mean your voluntary *confession of faith*—in which my plainness cannot possibly suspect the least ambiguity—and your, as yet, unabated repugnance to our religion.

“ Not that I mean in any way to *force* you, dear friend of truth, to refute *Bonnet* on Christianity, or to *show cause* why you are an Israelite and not a Christian. I have no right to do so. But I *must* say, as I have already intimated, that I look upon the *main* arguments for the *facts* of Christianity as unanswerable; and say I *will* that my attachment to my faith should not deter me from renouncing it, could its spuriousness be made manifest to me, or could I be only persuaded that the moral and historical evidence of *the divinity of the mission of Jesus has less theological worth* than the proofs on which you found *the divinity of the legation of Moses and the prophets*.—In things emanating from mortals we may be indulgent; God has no need of indulgence. That is no religion for me—however fair it may appear in some lights—which would pass for *divine*,

in the *sublimest* sense, and yet turn out, by the light of impartial investigation, to be a mere tissue of *consummate craft*; no matter how pious the intentions the imposture may appear to arise from.

“ But I recollect, that the opinion of yours which induces me to declare these sentiments, does not bear upon arguments for Christianity in general, but only upon *Bonnet's*, which you think inferior to many other apologies for my religion. Now, as I must still believe that I have reason to rank *Bonnet* amongst the principal vindicators of Christianity; knowing of no other author amongst those that I have read who so strictly adheres to the rules of sound logic, handles his demonstrations in a more interesting manner, connects them more closely, and establishes them more firmly; it concerns me very much to know the reasons by which *your* judgment is supported. The knowledge and examination of them would be, in every respect, useful and instructive to me; even if I should find myself thereby induced to condemn proofs of



my faith, which I have hitherto considered as invincible. I would even count the exposure of weakness in any one of the arguments in favour of my religion, a service, a benefaction, deserving my warmest thanks. What avails me a staff on which I cannot lean with perfect security?

“ But what am I to do now? *You* say you are under no obligation to engage in polemical disputes, either for the sake of propagating your own religion, or of convincing others of the futility of theirs. Amongst your reasons for this, I considered those to be most cogent which are deduced from the nature of *your* religion. I can conceive very well, even from my own ideas of Judaism, formed on our joint revelation, why the *Mosaic* church *does not wish* to be extended beyond the descendants of Israel; and that thus, of course, the spirit of converting does not take place in it. Of Christianity, on the contrary, I must, doubtless, think the reverse; this *is*, from its nature, to be a *universal* religion, adapted to *all* nations. I therefore, as a Christian, consider myself under the strongest obligation

(however lost sight of by many of my brethren) to promulgate the glory of my Lord and Master, and the truth of his faith, by every means consistent with reason, and the nature of the object, and to divest it of all pernicious prejudices.

“ Although I am sensible, for this reason—as also partly for the others before stated—of the impropriety of a *public* challenge, yet I cannot refrain from beseeching you, sir, from beseeching you, I repeat, for the furtherance of truth, so precious to both of us, that, provided no paramount motives interfere—which neither the public nor myself have any claim to inquire into—you will point out, at your convenient leisure, at least to *me*, (unless you prefer to point it out to the public,) in what respect Bonnet’s Inquiry trespasses against logic. Whether your *counter-inquiry* be directed against *Bonnet*, or (which I should like best) against the cause which he defends, do not give it up definitively, at least not so far as I am concerned. Should you do me the favour of entering with me into a private correspond-

ence on the subject, it will then depend on our mutual approval, to have the whole, or the result of it, eventually published. Of thus much I am certain, that your *counter-inquiry* would be written in such a philosophical and temperate mood, it would have so little the appearance of a controversial writing, that not the slightest suspicion of a hostile intention against that which is held most sacred by the nation, by whom you are protected, could ever attach to it. Permit me to say, that your letter to me leaves no room at all for apprehending that you are likely to overstep the boundaries of philosophical gravity and impartiality.

“ I accept with sincere thanks, also, those parts of your letter which enable me to form, from yourself and from your mode of thinking, a correct knowledge and estimation of the sentiments which pervade pure Judaism, and the better description of rabbinical writings. You have indeed made me desirous of knowing more of them. A direction to the most profound works which *your* nation can bring forward, would perhaps give many an unpre-

judiced Christian, more becoming notions of *the stock* on which *we boast of being grafted*. And who knows, but an insight into the *best system* of Judaism, might lead to the removal of many a stumbling-block, now lying between it and Christianity. What say you, dearest friend, if my, in other respects, premature dedication, and your excellent letter, were an accidental instigation to this further correspondence—would not the unpleasant situation in which I have, unintentionally, placed you, be, by this means, changed into a very agreeable one? For my own part, I should have no longer reason to regret my well-meant dedication, if, to it, the intellectual portion of the public shall be indebted for the acquisition of that letter.

“Let me now proclaim, in homage to truth, that I meet in your letter with sentiments which I more than revere; sentiments, that have beguiled me into tears, which—pardon my weakness—drew forth the ejaculation, ‘*Would to God he were a Christian!*’—Not that I have the least doubt but that the s raelite, to whom the Omniscient must give

that testimonial of integrity, which I gave you in my dedication, will be every way as estimable in his sight, as an upright Christian. My gospel, too, teaches me, *God is no respecter of persons ; in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* Again, our joint philosophy and revelation lead us to adopt *gradations* of beatitude in future life. The proportion of felicity, they inform us, will, in all rational beings, be equal to their moral receptibility. Now, according to *my* notions, a *Christian* can reach the highest degree of this moral faculty *easiest* and *speediest*. Would you then not willingly pardon me, if this conviction, closely identified too with my nature, has prompted me, as it still does, to wish, from the bottom of my soul, that you may take the *shortest* road to *supreme virtue* and to *supreme felicity* !

“ Much more that I could say on this subject remains in my heart, which remembers you with the tranquillity of innocence, and with the delight of friendship and affection !—But enough, before the public ! Let us now drop

the curtain, and give no inducement to further perversions and feuds, through which, I find, to my no small sorrow, you have, notwithstanding all your solicitude and prudence, already been a sufferer. Our aim is *truth*, not the gratification of sectarianism; and truth is too sacred a thing, that we should allow ourselves to bandy it, merely for the diversion of idle spectators; much less permit it to be given up to the subtle equivocation and oblique judgment of those with whom deceit is ever current, when they find it will serve to blazen the credit of their party.

“ I conclude, not only with renovated feelings of veneration, and the tenderest affection, but also with the impression (probably as chimerical, in your estimation, as it is *firm* and rapturous in mine) of meeting with you, if not shortly, at all events at some future period, amongst the happy worshippers of *him, whose inheritance is the congregation of Jacob*; even of my Lord and Master *Jesus Christ*, blessed to all eternity. Amen!

“ JOHANN CASPER LAVATER.

“Zurich, the 14th February, 1770.”

However unimportant this correspondence may appear to us now, it affords a beautiful specimen of urbanity and delicacy in learned and religious controversy, as different from more modern literary squabbles, as a *corte d'amore* from the feudal club-law. The public did *Mendelsohn* full justice for his cleverness, temperance, and consistency. Most of the journals of the day resounded his praise, and animadverted on *Lavater* for having worried a deserving and unmeddling man, with a view of involving him in a public transaction of a most delicate nature. *Lavater's* promise to relinquish his purpose, was *all*—and the manly and magnanimous avowal of his error, *more* than—*Mendelsohn* wanted. His humility felt oppressed, by what he thought unmerited encomium and excessive condescension; yet his consistency could not sit easy under some observations contained in the answer: which gave rise to the following publication, under the title of “Supplementary Remarks.”

“*Mr. Lavater* had the goodness to transmit to me his answer in manuscript, before he

consigned it to the press. I discern, in this proceeding, his undiminished kind attention and friendship towards me. But the answer itself exhibits, in my opinion, his moral character in its brightest excellence; it shows unerring marks of pure philanthropy, genuine piety, and ardent zeal for truth and virtue; unvarnished rectitude, and a moderation verging on humility. I am exceedingly happy that I have never been mistaken in the worth of this noble-minded mortal. Even in the effervescence of provocation, I did not suspect his intentions; however strange it must have appeared to me, to find the first address from a man of letters accompanied by a *public* challenge.

“I am highly obliged to *Mr. Lavater* for the justice he does to my scruples, and for declining to reduce me to the necessity of carrying on a controversy so repugnant to my disposition. During the few evening hours of relaxation which business spares me, I would fain rest in ignorance of all the variance, all the schisms, which have ever sown the seed of enmity between man and man; and



I even endeavour to erase from my memory, what personal experience I may necessarily have had of such subjects in the course of the day. In those felicitous hours, I delight in giving myself up to the unrestrained and undivided emotions of my heart, the feelings of which I am yet to learn how to assimilate with the state of a disputant. Nature never intended me for a wrestler, either in a physical or moral sense.

“It shows infinite magnanimity in *Mr. Lavater*, that he publicly asks my pardon. What need has he to do so? I declare, once more, before the public, that I have never felt myself offended by him. What he calls *importunate* and *improper* in his dedication, can, at the utmost, be ascribed to an overhasty zeal for truth, and this carries, at all events, forgiveness with it.

“The suspicion of his having acted against his promise, I did not repress through *complaisance* or *charity*; but, lest I should be unjust, I mentioned that promise in the vague manner I then recollected it. It occurred to me, generally, that something to that effect

had been stipulated on the occasion, though I could not tell the exact words, nor yet whether it was *Mr. Lavater*, or one of his friends who participated in the conversation, that gave the promise. Hence I could not have a more distinct idea of the charge, than I had of the ground of it; and now I am glad to be able to withdraw it altogether. I firmly believe *Mr. Lavater*, that the question was, simply, of an *indiscreet* use that might be *eventually prejudicial* to me, and I am perfectly satisfied that he was not aware of making *such* a use of it.

“As to what regards *Bonnet's* work, I confess, that my judgment on it referred entirely to the purpose for which it was recommended to me by *Mr. Lavater*. I might, it is true, have taken for granted, that it was not at all *Mr. Bonnet's* aim to oppugn, by his Inquiry, any religious persuasion whatsoever, least of all Judaism; but that he had only the benevolent intention of leading, by means of a more *wholesome* philosophy, back into the paths of truth, the sceptics and weak in faith of his own church, who have

been deluded by a *false* philosophy, to laugh at religion, Providence, immortality of the soul, resurrection, and retribution, as absurd superstitions. In this light I should have considered *Mr. Bonnet's* work, in order to form a more correct estimate of its merits.

“But the unlucky dedication had at once deranged the proper aspect of things. And as that was the point from which I started, and not knowing that the author had disapproved of the translator's proceeding, I read the whole performance under the impression, that it was levelled against myself, and those of my persuasion. In this view, then, the use and application which *Mr. Bonnet* makes of philosophical principles, could not but appear to me loose and arbitrary; and I *could* say, with propriety, that I was confident I could vindicate, in the same manner, *any religion one pleases*.

“This assertion appears singular to *Mr. Lavater*. He is at a loss, on the one hand, how to make it chime with the *belief in revelation*, and cannot, on the other, absolve me from *strong prejudice in favour of my reli-*

*gion*. Whether I do or do not nourish prejudices in favour of my religion, I am *myself* as little able to ascertain as whether my breath is sweet or not. But that my assertion does not contradict the *belief in revelation*, I am perfectly convinced of. I will mention a single point by way of illustration.

“ *Mr. Bonnet* constitutes miracles the infallible criterions of truth; and maintains that if there be but credible testimony that a prophet has wrought miracles, his divine mission is no longer to be called in question. He then actually demonstrates, by very sound logic, that there is nothing impossible in miracles, and that testimony concerning them may be deserving of credit.

“ Now, according to *my* religious theory, miracles are not, indiscriminately, a *distinctive* mark of truth; nor do they yield a moral evidence of a prophet's divine legation. The public giving of the law, *only*, could, according to our creed, impart satisfactory authenticity; because the ambassador had, in this case, no need of credentials, the

divine commission being given *in the hearing of the whole nation*. Here no truths were to be confirmed by actual proceedings, no doctrine by preternatural occurrences, but it was intended it should be believed, that the divine manifestation had chosen this very prophet for its legate, *as every individual had heard himself the nomination*. Accordingly we read, (Exod. xix. 9.) *And the Lord said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak unto thee, and believe thee for ever :* and (Exod. iii. 12.) *And this shall be a token unto thee. When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain*. Our belief in a revealed religion is, therefore, not founded in miracles but on a public legislation. The precept to hearken to a wonder-working prophet (Deut. xviii. 15.) is, as our rabbins teach, a mere implicit law, as given by the legislator, and quite independent of the intrinsic evidence of such wonders. So does a similar law (Deut. xvii. 6.) direct us to abide, in juridical cases, by the evidence of two witnesses,

though we are not bound to consider their evidence as infallible. Further information on this Jewish elemental law will be found in *Maimonides' Elements of the Law*, chap. 8, 9, 10. And there is an ample illustration of this passage of *Maimonides*, in *Rabbi Joseph Albo, Sepher Ikkarim*, sect. i. cap. 18.

“ I also meet with decisive texts in the Old Testament, and even in the New, showing that there is nothing extraordinary in enticers and false prophets performing miracles ;\* whether by magic, occult sciences, or by the misapplication of a gift truly conferred on them for proper purposes, I will not pretend to determine. So much, however, appears to me incontrovertible, that, according to the naked text of Scripture,

\* How are we, for instance, to account for the Egyptian magicians ?—In the Old Testament (Deut. xiii. 2.) a case is laid down, when we are not to hearken to a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, even if he give a sign or a wonder, but put him to death. In the New Testament it is distinctly said, (Mat. xxiv. 24.) *For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, &c.*—Not to mention other texts.

miracles cannot be taken as *absolute criteria* of a divine mission.

“ I could, therefore, perfectly well maintain that an argument, founded on the infallibility of miracles, does not decide anything against the believers in my religion, since we do not acknowledge that infallibility. My Jewish principles will fully bear me out in the assertion, that I would undertake to vindicate, by similar reasoning, *any religion one pleases* ; because I do not know any religion which has not signs and miracles to produce ; and surely every one has a right to place confidence in his forefathers. All revelation is propagated by tradition and by monuments. There, I suppose, we agree. But, according to the fundamentals of my religion, not miracles only, but a public giving of the law, must be the *origin* of tradition.

“ It will now be seen that the assertion of mine, which *Mr. Lavater* calls singular, is not only compatible with the belief in a revelation, but that it even emanates from the very elements of my religion. As an Israelite, I have argued on Israelitish princi-

ples. How could I have done otherwise, under the impression that *Mr. Bonnet* meant to controvert those principles? But now that I am aware that this excellent author's design was to oppugn the unbelievers of his own church only, and to show *them* that the doctrines which they revile are, by far, more reconcilable with sound reason than their own fantastic delirium, many difficulties which I have met with on reading the German translation, of course vanish of themselves; and I must own, that, so far as its scope goes, the work is more important, and more worthy of *Mr. Bonnet's* pen, than I had, at first, an idea of.

“ In my letter to *Mr. Lavater*, I said, *if I am not mistaken, most of Mr. Bonnet's hypotheses are of German growth.* My friends think this is liable to be interpreted into a charge of *plagiarism* against *Mr. Bonnet*; though, for my own part, I do not see in which way it is so, without a violent perversion and wilful misconstruction of my words. *Mr. Bonnet* is one of the most learned authors of our age, whose works I



read with utility and pleasure, and whose moral character I hold in the highest veneration. I should never forgive myself if such an odious imputation had ever escaped me, even as an innuendo. Generally speaking, I have always been of opinion, that, in metaphysical matters in particular, we cannot be too cautious in judging of their originality; since the reproach of plagiarism, in *this* science, is the more offensive, the more difficult it is to bring it home. We may almost say, that no new metaphysical truths have been discovered for ages past. The most important objects of human knowledge which deserve inquiry have been so multifariously handled, and surveyed under such a variety of aspects, that one must almost broach an *absurdity* in order to produce a *novelty*. Nay, an ancient philosopher had occasion to complain, that, even in his days, absurdity itself had been forestalled by still more ancient philosophers. In what philosophical writers have not some of the opinions of *Leibnitz* been really or imaginatively traced? From excessive modesty, or, perhaps, because eru-

dition stood with him as high as genius, he himself seldom asserted any thing without attributing it to some ancient or other. But suppose he had *not* done so, who would dare to charge *him* with plagiarism?

“He who brightens up ideas in the abstruser parts of philosophy, who shows truths in a more favourable light than they had hitherto appeared, and brings them into connection with other important truths: he who unites, like *Mr. Bonnet*, acute *tact* with ingenious speculation, and thereby possesses the art of leading slow, but sure, common sense up the steepest acclivities of genius, cannot, without injustice, be absolutely denied the merit of invention. Nor did it ever come into my head to dispute *Mr. Bonnet's* possession of that merit. I only meant to let *Mr. Lavater* see (and so it will appear to every sensible reader, from the context) that the philosophical principles on which *Mr. Bonnet* rests his positions, are not new to a *German*; that, subsequent to *Leibnitz*, all the *Monadists*, and especially *Hansch*, *Buef-finger*, *Canz*, and *Baumgarten*, have arrived,

by subtle speculations, to where the *Palingenesist* leads along the road of observation. A man like *Mr. Bonnet* is not to be blamed for not having read those German authors. *Leibnitz* is the only one who could not be unknown to him; and to this ornament of Germany, *Bonnet*, as a *Palingenesist*, does all possible justice. The successors of *Leibnitz* are not so generally known out of Germany as they deserve to be; but of myself, as a *German*, *Mr. Lavater* might have taken for granted, that I had read our native authors.

“Several passages in *Mr. Lavater's* answer strengthen my resolution never to enter into a public controversy on religious topics. He finds, in my confession, much which seems to him paradoxical, enigmatical, and inconceivable. I am not at all surprised at it; for I can just as little see my way clearly to *his* creed. However near we may come to each other when the question is of morality and propriety, we still differ widely when that of *dogmas* is agitated; and I apprehend we shall have to fall back a great

distance before we coincide on the point whence we could start together. The judgment of mankind is so trained to habitual notions, prepossessed opinions, and inculcated theories, that two men, like *Mr. Lavater* and myself, who have been bred and instructed on such heterogeneous principles, must be of quite a different mind on many points and opinions. In a matter so complicated, and of such vital importance, the least *soar* puts reason out of its orbit, and the more impetuous, is its flight the further will it stray. It is incumbent on the true philosopher to acknowledge this risk, and to beware of it, for his own sake, as well as for that of his fellow-creatures. He must, on this account, not always be diffident of his *conviction*; but when he has doubted with reason, and once acquired certainty *to the best of his judgment*, he ought to be easy on that point, not letting the result of his investigation evaporate through fickleness, but proceeding in his further researches. Nevertheless, he must not cease to bear in mind that this is only his *own conviction*, and

that other rational beings who have started from other points, and have followed different clues, may arrive at quite opposite conclusions.

“These sentiments I have adopted for many years past, and have endeavoured, in consequence, to observe a middle course between a dogmatist and a sceptic. Dogmatically, in the strictest sense of the word, have I made up my mind, *so far as regards myself*, on the most important points of religion and morality; and I may say, that I am myself rooted where I believe truth to prevail. But, on the contrary, I am just as great a *sceptic* when I am to judge my *neighbours*. I allow every one the right which I claim for myself, and place the utmost distrust in my capacity to bring over to my opinion one who has likewise made up *his* mind; therefore, it cannot but be highly gratifying to me that *Mr. Lavater* consents to close herewith our public correspondence.

“Indeed, *why* should we let the public witness such particularizations? It does not become either *Mr. Lavater* or myself to

afford, by these public exhibitions, diversion to the idle, scandal to the weak and wicked, or gratification to the scoffers, at what is good and true. The truths which we recognise, and espouse *in common*, are not yet sufficiently current, that we may promise ourselves any signal benefit to the good cause from a public discussion of the points on which we do not yet agree. What a blissful world we should live in did all men espouse and carry into practice, those sacred truths, in which the *worthier Christian* participates with the *worthier Jew* ! ( May the *Lord Zeboath* speedily bring on those happy days, when *no one shall hurt nor destroy, for the whole earth shall be full of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*\* The day of which it is written : *And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord ; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them.*†

Here this matter would have quietly ended,

\* Isaiah, xi. 9.

† Jeremiah, xxxi. 34.

had it not been for the officious interference of restless German authorship; which deluged the literary market with a variety of pamphlets and a good *quantum* of trash on the subject, to the annoyance of the public, and especially of the celebrated correspondents. The most prominent of these ephemeral publications, too prolix and too coarse to deserve much mention here, was written by one *Johann Balthasar Koelbele*, of *Frankfort on the Maine*; a kind of pedantic nondescript, compounded of lawyer, polemic, and—as he himself declares—reclaimed deist; of course the more furious zealot on the latter account. *Mendelsohn* did not deign to answer his epistle formally, but he animadverted keenly upon it, in a continuation to the preceding supplementary remarks; and gave, for once, a proof, that, when he had a mind, he could apply the lash of satire as ably as he could handle a philosophical argument.\* These illiberal attacks, however, strengthened him still more

\* See an extract from Mendelsohn's Remarks on J. B. Kölbele's Pamphlet, in the Appendix to this work.

in his resolution never to engage in public religious discussions, and to take no notice of any controversial questions addressed to him; to which determination he ever afterwards adhered.

So far the storm was now laid; but *Mendelsohn's* late mental uneasiness, wounded feelings, bodily exertions, and above all, his antipathy to strife and recrimination, increased his disorder to such an alarming degree, that he was no longer capable of intense meditation, without feeling acute pain, in some part of his body, and a violent head-ache, that baffled all medical treatment. In this state he lingered a considerable while. His friends and reverers mourned for their teacher; despaired of his recovery from a complaint, often fatal to the robust, much more so to persons of his delicate constitution, and expected to hear no more treasures of thought from his lips. Wisdom will act with propriety on all occasions, but we best see its effects in cases of emergency. When *Mendelsohn* felt his strength rapidly declining, he abstained entirely from reading and medi-



tation, and, though naturally abstemious, observed a more than usually rigorous regimen, that he might lose no chance of recovery, and of becoming again useful to his disciples and the public at large. During his illness, he would not even participate in any serious conversation; and being once asked how he ~~passed~~ his time, answered, that, to drive away tedium, he counted the pantiles on the neighbouring houses. The celebrated *Zimmerman*, author of the "Essay on Solitude," pays *Mendelsohn*, somewhere, an elegant compliment on the fortitude and self-denial with which, he says, he had contrived to beat off, for a time, the great adversary death, as calmly and effectually as he had silenced his polemical adversaries. He gradually recovered, and commemorated his return to health by an admirable commentary on the book of "*Ecclesiasticus*."

About this time, *Frederic II.* ordered the Jewish code of civil laws to be laid before him, in order to judge, whether it did not militate against the laws of the land, and whether the tribunals could fitly act by it, as heretofore,

in cases between one Jew and another. The royal mandate was directed to the chief rabbi of the Prussian monarchy, who requested *Mendelsohn* to form a digest, in German, of the "*Hoshen hamishpat*," i. e. the "*Breast-plate of Justice*," principally as relating to laws of inheritance, immovable property, minority, testamentary bequests, and oral legacies. He arranged what was required, conjointly with the rabbi; it was laid before the king and council, approved of, and published in 1778, under the title of "*Ritual Laws of the Jews*."\*

In no part of Europe are Jews more numerous than in Poland, Hungary, Bohemia, and Moravia. Their notorious *prolificality*, owing to religious, moral, and physiological causes, proved too great for a population debarred, as it then was, from most of the resources of industry that were open to all other members of civil society. The natural consequence of such a precarious existence, was emigration; and like *nomad* hordes, who leave the plains, which their flocks have laid

\* *Ritual-Gesetze der Juden.*

bare, and go in search of fresh pasturage elsewhere, so numbers of Polanders, Hungarians, &c. used to issue forth, from time to time, from their native land, to *them* no fostering country—from the parental roof, to *them* no cheerful home—from the circle of their starving wives and children, to *them* no solace—and spread over Germany and Holland, without any trade, profession, or settled purpose whatsoever. Some, it is true, took to commerce, and became, through their peculiar shrewdness, versatility, and frugality, respectable and opulent men, and ornaments to society. Not a few acquired, through genius and industry, skill in professions and the arts, and even renown for literature and science: but by far the greater part, either deterred by the pride of scholarship, discouraged by inexperience, or governed by indolence and bad example, loathed itinerant traffic, and chose the more convenient, and rather more reputable, calling of religious teachers; a drudgery which the less indigent and better employed German and Dutch Jews were glad to have taken off their own hands. However

the general learned education of those emigrants, might have qualified them for tuition, yet their ignorance of every interpreting medium, except their native language, was a most serious impediment. Thus Scripture, which is taught to Jewish males from infancy, was, formerly, expounded to them in a jargon, so uncouth and barbarous, that the German now spoken by the lower order of Jews, may be called, comparatively, pure and classical. The enlightened and philanthropic had long been deprecating this practice, and its prejudicial influence on religion and education, and would have taken measures to abolish it; but the self-interested pedagogues, coalescing with bigoted parents, formed too formidable an opposition, to be overcome by any thing but coercion, which was, as it should always be in matters of conscience, quite out of the question. Thus the evil continued unabated, in spite of the general improvement of the age, and the laudable example of the Portuguese Jews, who teach the written and oral law in pure and grammatical Spanish, when *Mendelsohn* brought to light, in 1779,

his admirable translation of the Pentateuch; a work which forms an epoch in the history of modern Judaism, and which, for its vast utility, and the immense good it has wrought, entitles the author to the eternal gratitude of his nation. The excellencies of this translation, which is printed in Hebrew characters,\* opposite to the original, are too well known and acknowledged, to require enumeration. For elegance and perspicuity it has no equal. Not an obscure or ambiguous text, but what is made clear; not a noun or verb, but what is rendered in its true sense. His scrupulous attention too to the *Massora*, proves his veneration of ancient institutions; not a single vowel-point or accent did he disturb; nor did he, with philological and antiquarian ostentation, ransack libraries, and travel in search of monuments, for new versions; or pretend to supply chasms, prune redundancies, or alter readings. The preface, as a treatise on the lyric songs in the books of Moses, and on the general rules of Hebrew poetry, so extolled by poets of all nations, is

\* There is also an edition printed in German characters.

a classical work by itself. Not but what the introduction of this useful book in seminaries, met, at first, with partial resistance by a remnant of fanatics of the age of darkness, sworn enemies to improvement, and trembling at every new measure, however judicious and salutary, which they were sure to stigmatize with the odious terms of heresy and encroachment ; but *Mendelsohn's* and his ingenious pupils' previous writings, had happily so undermined the arguments of these gainsayers, that the concentrated rays of this meridian sun of reformation, could not fail of exploding their power altogether. *Moses* the son of *Amram* delivered his brethren from *bodily* slavery ; the glorious task of emancipating their *minds* was reserved for *Moses* the son of *Mendel*. His brethren duly appreciated the boon, and his *Pentateuch* has ever since remained the basis of the religious and moral education of their children of *both* sexes.

In the year 1783, *Mendelsohn* published his metrical translation of the Psalms of David. It is the opinion of the learned in

general, that the poetical works of antiquity, taken together, bear no comparison to the Hebrew *Hagiography*. *Mendelsohn* exemplified this decision to the unlearned by exhibiting the sublimity of the sacred Bard's thoughts, and the beauty of his versification. It is evident, throughout this performance, that every chord touched by the royal Harper caused a responsive one to vibrate in the bosom of his translator. Other versions of the Psalms may lay a claim to greater philological nicety, but none breathes, like *Mendelsohn's*, the spirit and energy of the original in its minutest shades. Every deep sigh vented by the Poet swells, as it were, the translator's heart with a corresponding one; at every lofty hymn to the God of Israel for the wonders he wrought for his people, it throbs with sympathizing exultation. He was ten years in accomplishing this work, during which he always carried the Hebrew Psalms, bound with alternate blank leaves, about him. In the preface he says, he did not translate them in their regular order, but selected any one of

which the tenour was in unison with the state his mind happened to be in, and recommends to the reader to adopt the same method. This translation he caused to be printed in German characters, partly to give it a universal circulation, and partly to avoid the orthographical inaccuracies inseparable from German printed with Hebrew letters.—The translation of the *Song of Solomon* was published after his death by the Jewish Society for promoting merit and information amongst the Jews. *Mendelsohn's* principal object was to operate the cultivation of his brethren by means of Scripture; a method which has been strongly recommended by several of his learned successors. Scripture forms a Jew's religious and civil code, and is consequently the source of his most important knowledge; useful truths, when conveyed through this medium, make the deeper impression, and become, in a manner, sacred to him.

Like his prototype and namesake *Moses*, *Mendelsohn* delivered his people from the bondage of their benighted taskmasters;



like him, he led them forty years through the desert of ignorance and superstition, during which he sustained them with the manna of his wisdom, bore meekly and patiently with their stubbornness and perversity, and defeated their adversaries; and, like him too, he now stood on the summit of *Nebo*, with the noble prospect before him of the promised land of knowledge and general information, religious and moral improvement, and progressive civil and political restoration.—Alas! neither was *he* allowed to enter it; for he had but four years more to live. How short a space of time! but which nevertheless produced the mightiest efforts of his genius. Happily he had formed and left behind him more than one *Joshua*, who completed the work which he so gloriously began,

*Counsellor Von Dohm's* celebrated work, "*On the Condition of the Jews as Citizens of the State*,"\* which appeared in 1781, induced *Mendelsohn* to translate *Manasseh Ben Israel's Apology for the Jews* from the English, and accompany it with a preface,

\* *Ueber die bürgerliche Verfassung der Juden.*

which is universally considered a masterpiece, not inferior to many of *Tully's* orations. *Von Dohm's* work became exceedingly popular. He founded his arguments for the civil amelioration of the Jews, on the one hand, on the principles of justice and humanity; and on the other, on those of sound policy and political economy. The ministers of several German sovereigns solicited his detailed opinion on the feasibility of reconciling agriculture and mechanical trades, civic and military duty, with the Israelitish ceremonial law.—Some had it already in contemplation to form villages and small towns, and colonize them with Jews, under municipal officers of their own persuasion. Innumerable were the memorials, projects, hints, and suggestions, of which the prolific German press was delivered on that occasion. The greatest part, however, agreed, that the Jewish nation had not, hitherto, been fairly dealt with, and that it was time they should share in the rights of their species, in common with other classes of society.—[About this time, too, that en-

lightened prince *Joseph II.*, emperor of Germany, issued the memorable "*Decree of Toleration*;" in consequence of which the condition of the numerous Jews under his sceptre was rendered comparatively comfortable.—Nevertheless, it would have been extravagant to expect that a measure of such magnitude and importance should succeed without difficulties. Of those interposed on one side it is not necessary to speak here. The bulk of the Jews, especially in the remote provinces, were yet too much taken up by daily cares to find inclination or leisure for the novelties of literature; and the mystic and *miracle*-struck rabbis, in whose estimation the greatest of all miracles, the gradual emancipation of the Jews, was too simple in its operation, its causes too comprehensible, and its teeming—though as yet partial—accomplishment too near, to deserve the name of one, took no trouble to excite the attention of their flocks, and remained *ostensibly* neutral. *Now* it was that the grand champion once more raised his voice in the before-mentioned preface.

“God be praised,” said he, “for having sustained me, that I may yet see, in the evening of my life, the blossoms of charity and goodwill between man and man expand, and ripen into fruit. In his mercy, he has raised up in the land illustrious and virtuous individuals, to rouse the better feelings of the nation against the oppression and sufferings of brethren living under their protection. *Mr. Von Dohm*, as a benevolent and unprejudiced man, patronises the Jews; as a sagacious and patriotic statesman he foresees and covets the benefits which would accrue to the civil government, through their naturalization. Permanent prosperity, he is aware, will be attained, when guilds and corporations are abolished, and trades and professions thrown open to all subjects. The riches of a country consist in the industry of its inhabitants. What rendered Holland, a cluster of swampy and barren islets, one of the most fertile and wealthy states of Europe, but the liberality and toleration of its government? There the oppressed and persecuted in other parts of Europe found a

safe refuge ; the skilful and industrious a scope for their exertions : there they settled, prospered, grew powerful, and, in half a century, the desert was transformed into a paradise.

“ It is objected by some, that the Jews are both too indolent for agriculture, and too proud for mechanical trades ; that if the restrictions were removed, they would uniformly select the arts and sciences, as less laborious and more profitable, and soon engross all light, genteel, and learned professions. But let not those be hearkened to, who thus argue. They conclude, from the *present* state of things, how they will be in the *future*, which is not a fair mode of reasoning. What should induce a Jew to waste his time, in learning to manage the plough, the trowel, the plane, &c. whilst he knows he can make no practical use of them ? But put them into his hands, and suffer him to follow the bent of his inclinations, as freely as other subjects, and the result will not long be doubtful. Men of genius and talent will, of course, embrace the learned professions ; those of inferior capacities will turn their minds to mechanical

trades; the rustic will cultivate the land; each will contribute, according to his station in life, his quota to the aggregate of productive labour.

“I cannot, however, refrain from expressing my surprise at *Mr. Von Dohm’s* ideas of church government and ecclesiastical power. ‘*To the elders of the synagogues,*’ he says, ‘*belongs the duty of keeping a watchful eye on their congregations. They are to be invested with the authority of punishing every Jew who deviates from the essentials of his creed, with anathema, excommunication, and expulsion from their congregation.*’ I am at a loss what to think of an author, who holds the olive-branch in one hand, and the torch of discord in the other. It will, therefore, be requisite to inquire, publicly, whether it be proper to give men the power of arraigning and punishing others for religious and philosophical opinions.

“Civilized society requires of its members rectitude of conduct and purity of intention. These are the pivots on which the social compact turns, the foundation of confidence

and security in all mutual transactions through life. With regard to the conservation of public morality, it belongs to that magistrate to whom the sovereign, with the advice of his council, has delegated such authority. It is his province to try all cases of oppression, fraud, and affray; to punish the offender, and to right the injured. The magistrate being thus invested with authority, it can make no difference at all to us whether he be of this or of that religion; for so soon as we behold him seated in the judgment-seat, it behoves us to trust in him, that he will not pervert the law, nor be partial to suitors, whether Jews or Gentiles, natives or foreigners, but administer even-handed justice to all alike.] The patient stretched on the bed of sickness, and within a step of eternity, will implicitly confide in his physician, and take whatever he prescribes, without asking whether he believes in the God of Israel or not; because he knows it is the physician's business to cure the sick, and his duty to attend, and endeavour to give relief, to every one who has recourse to his abilities. If we

act thus, where life and health, the most precious gifts we hold, are concerned, we may surely in matters of dispute or imposition, which involve only property, and other external things, safely place our reliance on the judge appointed by the sovereign, let him be of what religion he may, without fear that a difference in belief will have any influence in his decision. Purity of intention, on the contrary, is vested in the heart of every rational being; it does not depend on the will, but on the understanding; and is therefore not subject to magisterial control, nor ought its opposite to be liable to punishment by the hands of man.

“What sensible person would pretend to reform his neighbour’s thoughts, or to chasten his heart by coercion? If we meet, in society, with a man of a froward heart, with wild and improper notions on the fundamental points of religion, we have no other power, but to reason with him in a mild and conciliating manner, and try to persuade him, by patient argument, to dismiss his erroneous opinions, and return to the wholesome doctrine; in



which we may persevere, until we are certain that the delusion has left him. If we find him incorrigible, it will be better to discontinue our efforts, lest we should convert a sceptic, who had, at least, the merit of sincerity, into a hypocrite and a liar. Would it not be preferable to rouse his conscience, and mortify his presumption, by showing him the humbleness of his condition, in regard to the Deity whom he disparages, than to stun him with abuse, heap shame and ignominy on his character, and, perhaps, prove his ruin? It is a widely different case when such a man is offensively licentious or blasphemous in public, when he sets a bad example to the community he belongs to, by proceedings subversive of morality, decency, and social order; then he steps out of *this* class, enters the *first*, and his conduct becomes cognizable to the magistrate, who, if he find him guilty, is to punish him for what he *has been doing*, but not for what he *has been thinking*. How much less right, then, have *we* to be indignant and vindictive on account of things, which, with our frail reason, we presume a

man<sup>r</sup> *capable of doing* ! A practice but too prevalent amongst the lower orders of society. After the most sedulous search in the *Talmud* and in the whole range of philosophical and ethical learning, I have not been able to find a single passage to justify sovereigns and governments in persecuting sectarians or dissenters from the established religion. If these dissenters are, occasionally, in the wrong, they are not wilfully so. The Creator implanted in them, as in all men, a longing after knowledge and perfection ; they suppose themselves to be in the path of truth ;—if they swerve from it in the integrity of their hearts, is that a sufficient reason for hatred and persecution ?

“Beware then, brethren, of judging uncharitably of your neighbours ; desist from dealing out anathema and excommunication on him who falls inadvertently. Rather draw him unto ye, with mild words and gentle persuasion. Forbid him not your meetings ; let not the doors of your assemblies and places of worship be shut to him when he comes to pour out his heart before his Maker.

If ye do, if ye cast him off, and consider him as a stranger, ye cut off the return to repentance; the guilt is *yours*, he is—*doubly* innocent. {The house of God should be accessible to all; it is properly the abode of universal love, and peace should encompass it; let then every mortal enter it, and adore the Supreme Being as his individual feelings guide him. *Moreover*, King Solomon prayed, *concerning a stranger that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name's sake, &c.; When he shall come and pray towards this house, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for.\** And ye, esteemed Christians, eminent for wisdom and learning, if it be your wish to promote peace and brotherly love amongst mankind, do not countenance with the force of your intellect the sway of one man over the religious opinions of another. God alone searches the heart, and knows our secret thoughts. *We* are but of yesterday, and know *nothing*. Show me a single instance in our holy law,

\* 1 Kings, viii. 43.

where it gives man a correctional jurisdiction over the thoughts and opinions of others. Our rabbinical doctors ordain, that sacrifices are to be accepted of the *transgressors of Israel*, to give them a chance of repentance.\* Do not deem it wise to rule the people with a rod of iron. Violence will not abide under the roof of Wisdom, nor will persecution, coercion, and degradation prevail where *she* presides. Do not proclaim on one side the treaty of peace and amity, and on the other the manifesto of war; but do justice, pursue righteousness, and teach truth in the paths of unanimity. Leave supremacy to God, and love each other like brethren, &c. &c.”

Towards the close of that year there appeared a small anonymous work under the title of “Search after Light and the Right,”† in which *Mendelsohn* was sharply attacked on account of his sentiments on ecclesiastical power, which the author, a man of first-rate talents, pronounced as diametrically opposite to the Mosaic law, which

\* Treatise Hullin, i. e. of unholy things.

† *Forschen nach Licht und Recht.*

ordains stripes for disobedience, and curses on scepticism. Whence he pretends to discover a great approximation to the Christian religion, probably the consequence of a maturer reflection on *Lavater's* or *Bonnet's* arguments, and exultingly congratulates his own church on the conversion of the Hebrew philosopher.

This induced *Mendelsohn* to declare once more his full opinion of religion and toleration; and in 1783, he published the work called "*Jerusalem, or on religious Power and Judaism.*"\* Notwithstanding this work was more criticised than any of his preceding ones, as the author advanced in it some positions on law, both natural and ecclesiastical, but especially the latter, which were diametrically opposed to generally received opinions;—notwithstanding it was declaimed against by Christians, as well as by those of his own persuasion, for the manner in which Judaism is vindicated, it shows, throughout, the masterly hand of the great philosopher and elegant writer, who understood the art

\* *Jerusalem, oder ueber religioese Macht und Judenthum,*

of clothing the most abstruse thoughts in the drapery of the Graces. And although no subject has been, during the last half-century, so multifariously handled as toleration, we do not recollect having read, any where, a passage on it so pathetic and forcible as that in the "*Jerusalem*." In the first part of the work he defines, on the principles of the social compact, the extent of church authority, vested in the elders of *alien* congregations, over such of their members as dissent from the fundamental points of religion; and inquires, whether they have a right, in such cases, to inflict anathema or excommunication, &c. &c. In the second part, which is entirely dedicated to the vindication of Judaism, there is a passage wherein he expresses himself, in substance, thus :

"The anonymous author, (of Search after Light and the Right,) chuckling at his fancied discovery of my dissenting opinions from the Mosaic faith, exclaims, 'Would to God *Mendelsohn* would do homage to truth, as it prevails in his heart, and that we could see him throw himself into the arms of our church,

&c. &c.'—Then he expatiates, in very flowery language, on the beauty and excellence of *his* religion, as inculcating love, peace, and goodwill amongst mankind, as abhorring rigour and coercion, &c. Now, anonymous friend, give me leave to request your advice in a particular emergency.—Suppose a fire should break out in my dwelling-house; the flames have already gutted the ground-floor, and the foundation-posts begin to totter. Will you have me fly for safety to the upper story? Can I rationally hope to find safety on the roof, whilst the lower part of the building, which supports it, is falling in?—When you find a man of judgment entertain opinions subversive of the Mosaic dispensation, does the question never occur to you, ‘What will become of the Christian one, which is founded on it?’—Verily, Searcher after Light and the Right! were I not purely, for the sake of *light and the right*, inclined to expatiate somewhat further, I should here have closed my discourse at once, by showing you, that your concluding wishes are in direct contradiction with the principles in which you

set out. However, I cannot lay down my pen, till I have introduced light into every part of this inquiry, in order to rebut the insidious insinuations made by *Merschel*,\* your 'squire, who says, he finds me as remote from Christianity, as you suppose me to be from Judaism, and that I am not much better than a *deist*. This notable discovery, the gentleman, a total stranger to me, founds upon a passage<sup>d</sup> in my preface to *Manasseh Ben Israel's Apology*, &c. where I say, '*The house of God is accessible to all, it is the abode of universal love, and peace encompasses it; let every mortal enter it, and adore the Supreme Being as he lists.*' He also draws a false conclusion, from my claiming equal rights and toleration in behalf of virtuous men of every religion; and maintains, in downright opposition to me, that it is impossible any believer in a recognised and established religion can lend his temple indiscriminately to every worshipper, unless he himself be indifferent to that religion.

\* *Merschel* wrote a continuation of the "Search after Light, &c." which was printed along with it.



Finally, he desires me to be candid with him, as to my real thoughts of religion; and protests before the public, that he is no ways desirous of seducing me from mine, nor does he think it desirable to give me an opportunity of attacking his, which has been the comfort and solace of his life. All this desiring and not desiring is = 0. However, I will be plain, and show the reader the course I take in inquiries like these. Perhaps *Mr. Merschel* may find what he desires and—what he does not desire.”

As a practical philosopher, in every sense of this term, *Mendelsohn* had, for some time, been inculcating the truths of natural philosophy to his eldest son *Joseph*, to his son in law, and to another young man of promising talents. He delivered to them methodical lectures every morning for two or three hours after sunrise, which he arranged for the press in 1785, under the title of “*Morning Hours,\* or Lectures on the Existence of God;*” and which he intended

\* *Morgenstunden; oder Vorlesungen ueber das Daseyn Gottes.*

to continue from time to time. The last sheets of the first volume were in the composer's hands when *Jacobi*, *privy counsellor to the Elector of Bavaria at Dusseldorf*, wrote to a learned Berlin lady, an acquaintance of *Mendelsohn's*, that having heard that the latter contemplated writing the life of *Lessing*, he wished to learn, through her means, whether *Mendelsohn* was privy to his friend's metaphysical principles, he (*Jacobi*) having good reason to believe *Lessing* to have been a *Spinozist*. This communication was no sooner made to *Mendelsohn* than he wrote to *Jacobi*, hitherto a stranger to him, for proofs of this odious assertion; and received, in reply, merely the substance of a former conversation between the latter and *Lessing*, which, if it proved *Spinozism* at all, brought it home to the accuser rather than to the accused. Shortly afterwards the first volume of the *Hours of Morning* appeared, wherein *Mendelsohn* raised that imperishable monument to his departed friend of which we have spoken in another part of this biography.

*Jacobi* felt very sore at this, and apprehending a public exposure of his principles by *Mendelsohn*, anticipated it by publishing "*Letters to Mr. Mendelsohn on the Doctrine of Spinoza*," in which he confessed his predilection for that system, endeavouring, at the same time, to extenuate it by saying, that where *reason* would not suffice, *faith* supplied, with him, the deficiency; that he was still true to the belief of his fathers, but that *Lessing* had been an implicit *Spinozist*.—To vituperate this staunchest advocate of the pure religion of nature, the author of *Nathan*, the most popular writer of Germany,—to vituperate him in the manner *Jacobi* did, was tantamount to holding him up not only as an atheist and blasphemer, but likewise as a hypocrite and scoffer: it was throwing suspicion on the principles and maxims of one of Germany's most authoritative writers. Could *Mendelsohn*, his heart glowing with friendship and affection, suffer the memory of his dearest, his never-to-be-forgotten friend, to be thus wantonly vilified? Could he sit still, and see the man

to whom he was indebted for his principal mental cultivation ; the man who had introduced him, as it were, in spite of himself, to the public as an author, stript of his fame, his rectitude, and veracity ? No ; a vindication was due not only to the deceased, but to the nation, to the world at large ; particularly as *Jacobi* did not hesitate to hint that *Mendelsohn* also was tainted with infidelity, and offered to teach him the way of saving himself from that perdition to which his speculations were likely to lead ; with similar aspersions, which sensibly hurt the good man's feelings. Indeed, his friends had never seen him so dejected and taciturn as he then was. Regardless of his tottering frame ; greatly emaciated with composing the first part of the "*Morning Hours* ;" subduing his horror of controversy of any kind, and of religious in particular ; anxious only to remove the first impression which *Jacobi's* work might have made, he wrote the "*Moses Mendelsohn to the Friends of Lessing*,"\* and sacrificed the last remainder

\* *Moses Mendelsohn an die Freunde Lessings.*

of his strength to the cause of friendship.

Independent of the subject of debate, namely, *Lessing's Spinozism*, this little work contains an important exposition concerning the distinctions between speculative opinions and plain common sense, and the guiding and disciplining of the former by the latter. "In the *Jerusalem*," says *Mendelsohn*, "I have, once for all, declared my sentiments on theological matters, by which I shall abide as long as I live. From my earliest youth I delighted in profound inquiry; even now I meet with new branches of the science of nature, which yield proofs of eternal truths as firm and irrefragable as any mathematical demonstration. But it is not by them alone that I stand. My adversaries may all rise against me, they may shake the principles on which I founded my inquiries; overthrow whatever I have advanced, and explode for ever all my theories; yet they shall not disturb, in my heart, one atom of those eternal truths which I believe will prevail and endure for ever. Through all the

walks of life, through all its gradations and incidents, we meet with proofs innumerable to corroborate our faith in those eternal truths. How expressive is the exclamation of that Greenlander who, seeing the rays of the rising sun pierce the mist, and shed their lustre on the snow-clad mountains, cried out to a German clergyman, ‘ *Look, brother, look ; the returning light of day ! if the creation is so excellent, how excellent must the Creator be !* ’ With all my inquiries and study, one such scene is sufficient to demonstrate to me the truth of those sublime lessons, and of the words of the sacred Bard :

He that planted the ear, shall he not hear ? He that formed the eye, shall he not see ?

He that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know ?\*

Whatever plain sense, which is common to all men, taught me, that is before me, like the light at noon-day. So long as the study of any science assists me in fathoming and comprehending the laws of nature, I follow it with satisfaction and delight ; but when it

\* Psalm xciv. 9, 10.

proves insufficient, I leave the path of inquiry, and trust to the solution of common sense only, which never deceives me. Let the proficient pursue this course before he runs his head against the dark mountains, which wiseacres and misleaders have raised in the walks of inquiry, he will discern and know it as the unobstructed path which the sincere will tread to acquire the knowledge of God, and of the true and eternal doctrine on which our happiness depends."

In that part of the work which immediately concerns *Lessing*, both the philosopher's heart and mind appear in extreme agitation. The bitterness and indignation of stung friendship pervade every line; the profoundest sagacity is relieved by flashes of the most exquisite irony, and the very probable turn which he manages to give to *Lessing's* conversation with *Jacobi* is a master-stroke in its kind.—Perhaps *Mendelsohn* has taken this affair rather too seriously; but his generous heart could certainly not have viewed it in any other light. This dispute made *Kant* say, with no less wit than

truth, "It is *Mendelsohn's* fault that *Jacobi* thinks himself a philosopher."

This quarrel had, however, a very injurious effect on his health, and it also deranged the plan of the second volume of the "*Morning Hours*," in which he purposed inserting the correspondence with *Jacobi*, whence the dispute originated. He could not now postpone this work so as to finish it with his accustomed calmness, and he used extraordinary exertions to form an entirely new arrangement, both as to the introduction of matter and the mode of developing it. The effervescence which this intense application caused in his blood, together with the constitutional weakness of his nerves, required only a trifling casualty to render the result fatal. Returning from the synagogue on a frosty Saturday morning, he caught a cold, which terminated his career on the following Wednesday, the 4th of January, 1786, at the age of fifty-seven years and four months.

*Mendelsohn* died as he had lived, calm and placid; and took an earthly smile with him into eternity. When his death became



known, the whole city of *Berlin* was a scene of unfeigned sorrow. The citizens of all denominations looked upon the event as a national calamity. The nobility, the court, sent letters of condolence to the widow; *Professor Rammler*, amongst several other celebrated poets, wrote a beautiful elegy on his death in alternate stanzas by the Jewish and Christian nations, represented by two mourning females, *Sulamith* and *Eusebia*; and the learned of all parts of Europe, where his writings were known, paid him a tribute of their respect by joining the general lamentation.

*Mendelsohn* was of a short stature, very thin, and deformed in the back. His complexion was very dark and sallow; hair black and curly; nose rather large and aquiline. A gentle smile constantly played round his mouth, which was always a little open. Nothing could exceed the fire of his eyes; and there was so much kindness, modesty, and benevolence portrayed on his countenance, that he won every heart at first sight. His vaulted brow, and the general

cast of his features, bespoke a vast intellect and noble heart.

Intense meditation, to which he had dedicated almost the whole of his life, could not but become injurious to a frame so delicate and so untowardly constructed. Still this excellent man continued his pursuits without any sensible deterioration of his health, so long as his labours were merely speculative; but when *Lavater's* challenge involved his *feelings* also, he then suddenly felt the most dreadful consequences of his mode of living; and had it not been for the fortitude with which, as a truly practical sage, he renounced, for entire years, all physical and mental enjoyment, he would have probably been much earlier snatched away from the world and from his friends. From sensual gratification he abstained firmly to the end. It was inconceivable, that the quantity of food, to which he restricted himself, could sustain a human being; and, at the same time, it was affecting to see him press his guests, good-humouredly, to partake of viands and liquors,

which himself, though ever so desirous, durst not venture to taste. But the spiritual enjoyment of reading, and the still more attractive one of composing, he, who was all spirit, could not continue to forego. Short compositions, on which he might have ventured with impunity in his serene hours, enticed him further and further. He began to rake up his former favourite ideas, and had the world but suffered him to go on in his own way, had they not forced him, once more, out of the sphere of tranquil speculation, he would, probably, have preserved his life several years longer.

He was very fond of company, and never courted solitude, except from four or five o'clock in the morning, till about eight or nine, when he adjourned to his counting-house, and remained there till noon. After dinner, he generally attended to business again, till about four in the afternoon. About this hour, his friends and pupils used to meet at his house, and on his return, he usually found a numerous assembly in his room, who anxiously awaited his appearance. There

were theologians, literati, philosophers, public functionaries, merchants, natives, foreigners, old and young, in promiscuous groups, with whom he conversed till eight o'clock on various topics.

He possessed, in an eminent degree, the talent of conversing with each person on his individual pursuits ; and that, with such judgment and technicality, as if the pursuit had been peculiarly his own. He would never maintain any thing positively, but always made his assertions appear like a problem, beginning his remarks, for instance, with the words, "I should think," "It may be said," "What is your opinion?" "Suppose we say," &c. In his discourses, indeed, we never lose sight of his illustrious model, *Socrates*.\*

He had, by nature, a rich vein of satire,

\* A young man, anxious to parade his learning, craved his opinion on a passage in *Eben Esra* on special Providence. "I do not comprehend the meaning of it myself," said *Mendelsohn* ; "but in order to ascertain the distinction, it will be best to contemplate the works of God, his goodness and mercy to *all* his creatures, and then it will be time enough to study *Eben Esra*."

approaching very nearly to the irony of the Greek philosophers; it pierced, like the sting of a bee, those, on whom he found it, occasionally, necessary to inflict it. But he was always on his guard, and stifled many a witty thought, from fear of giving offence.

The great *Frederic* once sent for him, to come to *Potzdam*. It happened to be Saturday, on which day Jews are not allowed to ride on horseback or in coaches. *Mendelsohn* therefore entered the royal residence on foot. The officer on duty, a sprig of nobility, who, of course, had never read either "*Phædon*," or the "*Philosophical Letters*," being informed that he was a *Jew*, called *Mendelsohn*, asked, amidst a volley of swearing and guard-room wit, what could have procured him the honour of being called to the king? The terrified philosopher replied, with the true causticity of *Diogenes*, "I am a slight of hand player." "Oh!" says the lieutenant, "that's another affair," and suffered the juggler *Mendelsohn* to pass, when he would have examined—who knows how long?—the philosopher *Mendelsohn*, and perhaps have arrested

him in the guard-room; since it is well known that more jugglers than philosophers pass through palace gates.

It was an invariable rule with him, never to enter into a discussion, on any particular matter, without first coming to a perfect understanding on the fundamental principles; for he maintained—truly enough!—that the majority of literary squabbles arise from definitions misunderstood. The Polish rabbis usually call their learned conversations “disputes,” because they immediately interpose objections and subtleties before the question is fairly stated. This *Mendelsohn* disliked above all things. One day, one of these gentry tumbled into his room, then full of company, and, in their unceremonious way, accosted him with “I am come to have a dispute\* with you, Rabbi *Moses*!” “I protest, before this company,” said *Mendelsohn*, good-humouredly, “that we are at peace with each other, and it shall not be broken.” How many thousands of polemical volumes there would be less in the world, if every

\* פילפול.

one attacked, from no other motive than that of the rabbi, had confined their answer to *Mendelsohn's* pacific declaration !

To the decisions of sound common sense he was remarkably partial, and deemed it the principal element of his philosophy. There are several letters of his, on mercantile affairs, still extant, in which he invariably appeals to it, as the highest tribunal, and also refers to the same, all friends who applied to him for advice.

Providence had blessed him with affluence. His fortune enabled him to live genteelly, keep a hospitable table, and support both his own, and his wife's poor relations, with a most liberal hand. Whenever any one had occasion for his good offices, and they were successful, the inward gratification of the philanthropist was seen to beam on his countenance. Many traits of integrity, magnanimity, and humanity, are still the favourite theme of his friends' conversations ; to recite them here, would not be in keeping with the biography of the most retired, the most modest of men.

How highly he was esteemed by the literati of *Berlin*, appears from the articles respecting him in the "Berlin Monthly Magazine," in *Nicolai's* "German Library," and particularly from the preface written to his last work, "To the Friends of Lessing," by the professors *Engel* and *Herz*. This preface is the most unintentional—and therefore the most affecting—eulogy on the departed sage. It is like the spontaneous tear of a noble heart, dropped on the grave of goodness and excellence.

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On a bust in Professor *Herz's* study, there was the following inscription :

*Moses Mendelsohn,*  
The greatest sage since *Socrates*,  
His own nation's glory,  
Any nation's ornament,  
The confidant  
Of *Lessing* and of Truth,  
Died,  
As he lived,  
Serene and wise.



Professor *Rammler* erected to him a monument, with this inscription:

*Moses Mendelsohn,*  
Born at Dessau, of hebrew parents,  
A sage like *Socrates*,  
Faithful to the ancient creed,  
Teaching immortality,  
Himself immortal.

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The following is a list of Mendelsohn's works.

#### HEBREW AND IN HEBREW CHARACTERS.

*Nesibat Hashalom* : i. e. The Path of Peace.  
The five Books of Moses, with commentary and German translation.

Commentary on Ecclesiasticus.

A Paraphrase and Commentary of Maimonides' Meditations.

*Hanephesh*, (the Soul.) Two Dissertations :  
edited after his death by Mr. D. Friedlaender.

The Song of Solomon, with German translation :  
edited after his death by Mr. Aaron Wolfszohn and Mr. Joel Briel.

#### IN GERMAN.

*Philosophische Schriften*, 2 vols.

Philosophical Writings. .

*Phædon, oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele.*

Phædon, or the Immortality of the Soul. (Has been translated in English.)

*Johann Jacob Rousseaus Abhandlung von dem Ursprung der Ungleichheit der Menschen.*

Jean Jacques Rousseau's Treatise on the Origin of the Inequality of Mankind.

*Schreiben an Herrn Johann Casper Lavater, Diaconus zu Zürich.*

Letter to the Rev. John Casper Lavater, at Zurich.

*Antwort an den Herrn Moses Mendelsohn von J. C. Lavater, nebst einer Nacherrinerung von Moses Mendelsohn.*

J. C. Lavater's Answer, with Supplementary Remarks by Moses Mendelsohn.

*Anmerkung zu Abbt's Freundschaftlicher Correspondenz.*

Remarks on the Correspondence with Abbt.

*Jerusalem, oder über religiöse Macht und Judenthum.*

Jerusalem, or Ecclesiastical Authority and Judaism.

*Morgenstunden, oder Vorlesungen über das Daseyn Gottes.*

Aurora. Lectures on the Existence of God.

*Von der Unkörperlichkeit der menschlichen Seele.*

On the Immateriality of the human Soul. (Published surreptitiously at Vienna, without the author's knowledge.)

*An die Freunde Lessings ; ein Anhang zu Herrn Jacobis Briefwechsel über die Lehre des Spinoza.*

To the Friends of Lessing ; an Appendix to Mr. Jacobi's Correspondence on the Doctrine of Spinoza.

*Pope ein Metaphisicker !*

Pope (Alexander) a Metaphysician !

*Ueber die Evidenz in Metaphysischen Wissenschaften.*

On Evidence in Metaphysics.

*Die Psalmen.*

The Psalms of David.

*Manasseh Ben Israels Rettung der Juden.*

Manasseh Ben Israel's Apology for the Jews.  
(From the English.)

*Uebersetzung der fünf Bücher Moses, zum Gebrauch der Jüdisch-Deutschen Nation.*

Translation of the five Books of Moses for the Use of the German Jews.

*Ritual-gesetze der Juden, betreffend Erbschaften, Vormundssachen, Testamente und Ehesachen, in so weit sie das Mein und Dein angehen.*

Ritual Laws of the Jews concerning Inheritance, Guardianship, Last Wills, Marriages, &c. as affecting Property only.

In addition to the above, *Mendelsohn* wrote several letters and articles in *Abbt's* friendly correspondence ; in the letters " On the newest Contemporary Literature ;" in " The Library of the Liberal Sciences ;" and in " The Universal German Library."—Besides several fugitive pieces ; as a

metrical translation of the most beautiful elegy,  
“ *Zion hallo tishalli*,” by Rabbi *Jehuda Halevi*.  
The triumphant Song of *Deborah*, (Judges v.) and  
some chapters of Rabbi *Jedaja Hapnini Badrashi’s*  
*Bechinath Olam*, (Test of the Universe.)

## NOTES.

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### Page 56. *The religion of the Patriarchs.*

THE seven chief precepts of the *Noachides* which comprise, nearly, the essentials of the law of nature; viz. forbidding 1. idolatry; 2. blasphemy; 3. murder; 4. theft; 5. incest; and enjoining, 6. the administration of justice. (These, it is supposed, were promulgated already to *Adam*.) Finally, 7. the prohibition of eating off a live animal, imparted to *Noah*. See *Talmud* on *Idolatry*, page 64. *Maimonides* on the Book of Kings, cap. 8. sect. 10.

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### Page 56: *Virtuous men of other nations.*

חסידיו אומות העולם. *Maimonides* adds the clause, "Provided they do not observe them, as mere precepts of nature, but as laws specially revealed by God." The *Talmud*, however, does not sanction this addition.

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### Page 56. *Children of eternal salvation.*

*Maimonides* on *Penitence*, cap. iii. sect. 5; and on the book of *Kings*, cap. viii. sect. 11. In an epistle to *Rabbi Hasdi Halevi*, this doctor expresses

himself thus : " As to what regards the other nations, know, my beloved ! that God looks only to the *heart* of men, and judges their deeds by their consciences. Hence, our sages teach, that the virtuous of other nations will participate in eternal salvation, in proportion as they are advanced in the knowledge of God, and the practice of virtue." *Manasseh Ben Israel* quotes, in his treatise *Nishmath Hajim*, (the Breath of Life,) decisive passages from the *Talmud*, the *Sohar*, and other authoritative books, which place this doctrine beyond all question. " We will not withhold from any human being his well-earned reward," says the author of *Cozri*.—Rabbi *Jacob Hirschel*, one of the most erudite rabbins of our days, treats very largely of this in several of his writings.

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*Extract from Mendelsohn's Remarks on J. B. Kölbele's coarse Pamphlet, mentioned page 103.*

\* \* \* " In my letter to *Mr. J. C. Lavater*, I alleged from the *Talmud*, and from *Maimonides*, that we Jews are not to seek to convert any one who is not born conformable to the principles of our religion. Whoever has the least knowledge of Judaism need not be told that those authorities are peremptorily decisive with us.\* *Mr. Kölbele* owns

\* *Talmud est opus doctrinale, sive corpus doctrinæ magnum, a variis ac doctissimis quibusque Rabbinis compilatum, multiplicem omnium scientiarum doctrinam continens, et potissimum jus civile ac canonicum Judæorum plenissime ac perfec-*

to have read the same in *Lightfoot*. Still he attempts to prove from the *Justinian* code, and from *Josephus*, that the Jews did actually strive, at various times, to convert other nations. And then he exclaims most triumphantly, ‘Now, *Mr. Mendelsohn*, is not your delineation of Jewish principles palpably incorrect?’

“What would Mr. K. say, if I were so unreasonable as to draw conclusions on the principles of Christianity from what has, at certain times, been done, and held meritorious by all Christendom?—Among the Jews too, there have been adulterers, profaners of the sabbath, stubborn and rebellious sons; should one, by such persons’ conduct, judge of the principles of our *religion*? I have no occasion at all to take the trouble of turning to *Josephus* for the passages which Mr. K. alludes to. I know that the lower orders of all sects are mighty fond of converting. The narrower the mind, the more excluding the principles. But the better informed amongst our nation endeavour to check with energy this proselyting fervour of the

tissime proponens, ut secundum illud universa gens et Synagoga Israelitica optime feliciterque vivat.—*Buxtorffi Recensio Operis Talmudici*, p. 191.

רבי משה בר מימון, רמבם Rabbi Moshe filius Maimoni, abbreviate *Rambam* dictus. Patria fuit Cordubensis, sed in Ægypto educatus et studiis consecratus, unde vocatus *Moses Ægyptius*. Vixit annos septuaginta, et tantum laudem sibi comparavit, ut de eo tritum dictum sit, ער משה לא היה כמשה ממשה *A Mose (propheta) usq. ad Mosen (Ægyptium) non fuit sicut iste Moses.* *Buxtorffi de Abbrevat. Hebræror.* fol. 161, artic. רמבם. Likewise fol. 291. *Rabbinica Bibliotheca*, artic. יר החוקה Of which he says, Operis summa hæc est.

rabble, which has been done also invariably by the supreme court of Jerusalem.\*

“ In the same place I assert, *that according to the spirit of my religion* there is no reason why virtuous men of other nations should not be saved. *That is,* (says Mr. K.) *according to Mr. Mendelsohn, and the EXOTERIC † language of the rabbins, but quite different from what EISENMENGER states.* What an authority! Refute the *Talmud* and *Maimonides* by *Eisenmenger*! In another place, Mr. K. again finds in his favourite *Eisenmenger*, (who has long since become contemptible to intelligent Christians,) that the principles of more modern Judaism do not sanction loving and admiring a *Confucius* or a *Solon*. Better informed authors would have told him, that our rabbins have even prescribed to us a special form of benediction, to be recited, whenever we behold a sage of another nation. ‡ One needs but to know the ineffable awe with which we contemplate the four-lettered name of the Most High, § not to suspect any equivocation or exoteric language here; for, according to our tenets,

\* Maimonides of Penitence.

† He must know the *Talmud* scarcely by name who imputes to it *exoteric* language from fear of man. Alas! how many persecutions have we had to endure because the writers of the *Talmud* were not prudent enough!

‡ (Maimonides on Forms of Benedictions, cap. 10. sect. 11.) According to the *Talmud*, the prayer is this: “Blessed be thou, O Lord our God, ruler of the universe! that thou hast imparted of thy wisdom to flesh and blood!” In rabbinical phraseology, *flesh and blood* means *man*, the *human race*. Buxtorff Lexic. Rabbin.; likewise de Abbrev. folio 45, art. כו

§ שם קדש, *Nomen*. Quomodo vocatur nomen tetragrammaton. Buxtorff. de Abbrev. folio 63, art. ט



that would be using the name of God in vain in a most reprehensible manner.

“ Does Mr. K. suppose to prove any thing against me, by arguing that clandestine Jews of Spain and Portugal go to Holland to get circumcised; and that baptized Jews too find an asylum there when they secede from Christianity?—When a native Israelite, *one of the congregation of Jacob*, has left that congregation through necessity or delusion, and wants to return into its bosom again, is it not to take him in?—Can *that* be called proselytomania?”

*Thoughts on Lavater's Proposition to Moses Mendelsohn to turn Christian, in a Letter from one Friend to another.*

SIR,

YOU have perhaps read the enclosed pamphlet; if not, I feel pleasure in handing it to you. It is highly interesting, inasmuch as it relates to religion, from the earliest ages to the present time; and it is my opinion we cannot think, or read too much, on a subject of such vital importance.

*Lavater*, in his dedication, wants *Mendelsohn* to renounce his religion, and publicly embrace Christianity. At least, so the latter takes it. But be this as it may, the challenge appears to me, at all events, a hardship upon *Mendelsohn*.

It is evident *Mendelsohn* cannot renounce the religion of his fathers so long as he is convinced of its divine origin.

The Founder of the Christian religion himself, was born and brought up a Jew. This, you will say, is no very forcible argument in favour of Judaism. Yet he never pronounced his national religion, so far as its elemental principles go, a false one; but, on the contrary, strove to purge it of errors and superstitious, to winnow it of pernicious prejudices and surreptitious additions, and to restore it to its pristine splendour.

We Christians derive our knowledge of God solely from Judaism, as refined by Christ and his apostles. We recognise the books of the Old Testament as

true and divine ; and our New Testament, with all the facts and circumstances recorded therein, is, strictly speaking, nothing but a refinement of the Mosaic law, at that time adulterated with hurtful prejudices and human ordinances ; and which, in consequence of this refinement, has, secondarily, been the means of enlightening Paganism, darkened by superstition and idolatry.

If we take a retrospect of the Jewish and Pagan world previous to the era of Christ, we shall find it, certainly, sad and deplorable. At the same time we cannot but pronounce the change these religions have severally undergone to be of the highest importance.

As Christians, we are in justice bound to adore, with profound awe and reverence, the great genius, of whom all-ruling Providence made use, at the time appointed, to accomplish a work of such magnitude and importance to the whole human race ; the propagation of which work has been so obviously favoured for a long series of ages. It is therefore we call Christ, with reason, the Saviour of mankind.

Viewing the matter in this light, the ingenuous and sagacious *Mendelsohn* could not, with all his contrariety to our religion, deny his tribute of respect to its Founder.

To a man like *Mendelsohn*, who has carefully analyzed his own religion, and confesses having found it to be alloyed with human additions, it could not have been difficult to detect a similar accumulation of dross in ours too, degenerated, as it visibly

has, in so many respects, from its original purity and simplicity. Nevertheless, if those blemishes were removed on either side, and the harmless prejudices which are concomitant to all religions were borne with indulgence, I am conscious of being in one and the same road with *Mendelsohn*, namely, in that which leads to the God of truth and justice, by whom *Lavater* has conjured him; and neither of us will have a plausible motive for renouncing the religion in which we have respectively been born and educated, &c. &c. &c.

## APPENDIX.

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THOMAS ABBT was born, 1738, at Ulm, in Suabia. In 1756, he went to the university of Halle, the principal chair of which was then filled by the celebrated *Baumgarten*. Here he applied himself chiefly to philosophy and mathematics, relinquishing divinity, for which he had been originally educated. In 1760, he was appointed professor extraordinary of philosophy at the university of *Frankfort on the Oder*, and there, in the very centre of the theatre of war, wrote the treatise on “*Dying for one’s Country*.” The year following he spent at Berlin, where he formed a connection with the two *Eulers*, *Mendelsohn*, and *Nicolai*, and accepted of the situation of professor of mathematics at the university of *Rintelen* in *Westphalia*. But he soon took an aversion to academical life, and began to study law, with the intention of qualifying himself for some civil office. In 1763, he travelled through the whole south of Germany, Switzerland, and part of France, but returned again to *Rintelen*, where he published, soon after, his work “*On Merit*,” to which he owes most of his celebrity. It abounds with sublime thoughts, novel and striking observations, and most excellent practical philosophy. This procured its

author a high and lucrative situation with one of the inferior German sovereigns, the prince of *Schaumburg Lippe*, who treated him with great personal friendship; a distinction, however, which he did not enjoy long, as he died at the early age of twenty-eight. The worthy prince caused his friend to be splendidly interred in his own chapel, and himself wrote a pathetic inscription on his monument. *Abbt's* works are full of profound thought, fancy, and spirit; and no doubt he would have become one of the first German authors had he lived to a more advanced age. As it is, he deserves to be ranked with those who contributed most to the refinement of the German language, which had been, till then, so much neglected. His style is particularly succinct and agreeable. *Nicolai* published *Abbt's* works, after his death, in six volumes.

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CHRISTOPHER FREDERIC NICOLAI was born at Berlin in 1733. In 1749, he was apprenticed to a bookseller at Frankfort on the Oder. By dint of perseverance and self-denial he contrived to find leisure for self-tuition in the Latin, Greek, and English languages. He read their best authors, at the same time studying mathematics, history, and philosophy; but most of all, literary biography. In 1752, he returned to Berlin, and took an active part in the business of his father, who was likewise a bookseller. The German literati were, at that time, divided into two parties, headed by *Gottsched*, and by *Bodmer*. *Nicolai* soon discovered the prejudices

of either party, and delivered his opinions thereon in the "*Letters on the Present State of the Liberal Sciences*," published in 1755. *Lessing* was amongst his friends, and made him acquainted with *Moses Mendelsohn*. This triumvirate then followed implicitly their zeal for science without any deference whatever to the authority of opinion. Of the three, *Lessing* was most lively and bold, *Mendelsohn* more considerate and sure, while *Nicolai* equalled both, at least, in love of truth and in courage. Most of the best thinkers of Germany united themselves with them in the sequel. In 1757, *Nicolai* retired from business, and devoted himself entirely to the sciences, living on a small income during the dear period of the seven years' war. Through *Winkelman's* works he became initiated in the fine arts, and *Marpurg* instructed him in musical composition. His elder brother, the head of the book establishment, dying in 1758, *C. F. Nicolai* was obliged to resume the management of the concern again. United with *Mendelsohn*, he had published the "*Library of the Liberal Arts and Sciences*," (four vols. Leipzig, 1757 to 1760.) At the fifth volume they transferred the publication to their friend *Weisse* at Leipzig. With this "*Library*" the better system of critique was introduced in Germany. The three friends, supported by *Abbt*, *Sulzer*, and others, now published the "*Letters on the newest Contemporary Literature*," (24 vols. Berlin, 1761 to 1766.) In 1765, *Nicolai* carried his project of the "*Universal German Library*" into execution. In this periodical, (107 vols. and 21

vols. supplement, Berlin, 1765—1792,) the German republic of letters asserted for the first time its rights of free suffrage. It made every new system subject to its most rigid scrutiny, and operated most powerfully, for more than forty years, on the progress of scientific cultivation in all parts of Germany. At the 107th volume, *Nicolai* ceased to be the publisher. It was then continued at *Kiel* in *Holstein*, under the title of “*New Universal German Literature, &c.*” At the 56th volume of the new series, *Nicolai* once more resumed the editorship, and his preface to that volume is a very remarkable piece of composition. The work was closed in 1805. The pointed and austere tone which this periodical assumed involved him in many quarrels. Of those who wrote against him we will name *Garve*, *Herder*, *Wieland*, *Fichte*, and *Lavater*; the latter called him an *endless wrangler*. None of those disputes became so vehement as that with *Stark*, first chaplain of the landgrave of *Hesse Darmstadt*, when *Nicolai*, *Biester*, and other writers of the *Berlin Magazine*; threw out hints of *Nicolai’s* latent dissemination of popery, and of the existence of disguised jesuits. From 1770 he directed his study to the financial and commercial relations of the Prussian state. His “*Characteristic Anecdotes of Frederic II. and his Court*,” (Berlin, 1792,) possess considerable historical merit. The minister of state, count *Von Herzberg*, granted him the use of the royal archives to revise his “*Topographic and Historical Description of Berlin and Potsdam*,” published Berlin, 1786, 3 vols. third edition. To his novels



no particular merit attaches as works of imagination, yet they are interesting as features of the times. His best, "*The Life and Opinions of Sebaldus Nothanker, Schoolmaster*," (4 vols. 1779,) was designed to expose the mania of persecution in its hideous nakedness; to lead enthusiasts back to sound reason, and to cure the age of its ridiculous sentimentality. It was translated into the French, Danish, Dutch, and Swedish languages. Provoked by his adversaries, he wrote, 1794, "*The Memoirs of a Lusty Man*," in 2 vols., in which he severely lashed literary coxcombs. Amongst his greater works, that which exposed him to the most controversy was his "*Journey through Germany and Switzerland in the Year 1784*," (12 vols. 8vo.,) a book which is very valuable in regard to its statistical merits and the boldness with which it is written. Accustomed, through his intercourse with *Mendelsohn*, to popular philosophy, *Nicolai* could not relish the new-fangled phraseology of *Kant's* "*Critique of pure Reason*;"\* although he was just to the author's ingenuity, who has, however, certainly introduced in his works a cloud of extravagant, novel technicalities. He, therefore, in his novel, called "*The Life and Opinions of Sempronius Gundibert, a German Philosopher*," made an attempt to throw ridicule on the oddities of the Kantian school. *Fichte* then wrote in reply, "*The Life and singular Opinions of F. Nicolai*," edited by *A. W. Schlegel*, 1801. The worthy veteran, *Nicolai*, received, nevertheless, many proofs of public esteem. He was

\* *Kritik der reinen Vernunft.*

elected member of the academies of Munich, Berlin, and St. Petersburg. His active life was supported by a very firm constitution; but in 1791 he was attacked by giddiness and violent nervous convulsions, and at the age of seventy-one he lost the use of one of his eyes. Nothing, however, so much disturbed the old man's happiness as the melancholy situation of his country, in the possession of revolutionary France. He died in 1811. Amongst many of his works not enumerated here, we will mention his "Essay on the Accusations brought against the Order of Knights-Templar, with a Supplement on the Origin of Freemasonry." Indeed, a great portion of *Nicolai's* research was devoted to "Secret Societies;" witness his "Remarks on Rosicrucians and Freemasons," (Berlin, 1782,) which is very profound, notwithstanding some bold hypotheses, as for instance, on the *Baffometus* of the Templars. He also wrote a clever treatise on the "Use of Artificial Hair and Wigs;" and lastly, his own Biography.

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GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM LESSING was born in the year 1720 at *Kamentz*, in Bohemia, where his father was minister. He received his first education at the freeschool of *Konigsberg*; and in 1741 was entered at the electoral seminary at *Meissen*, in Saxony, where he successfully studied Greek, Latin, and the mathematics. He left the seminary in 1746, after having delivered the usual parting oration, the subject of which was *De Mathematica Barbaro-*

rum, Thence he went to the university of Leipsig, where he became acquainted with the celebrated *Madame Neubaur*, the theatrical manager there, and took a part in a Critique on the Drama, then published at Hamburgh. Conjointly with *Weisse* he translated the "Hannibal" of *Marivaux* from the French, and brought out, on the Leipsig stage, his own "*Young Scholar*," which he had commenced writing when at school. However, his disinclination to every kind of professional study, and his intercourse with comedians, a proscribed cast in those days, determined his strictly-notioned parents to recall him home. There are yet a number of anacreontic songs of his extant, written about this time in a spot where love and the juice of the grape were the last things thought of. He returned again to Leipsig ; but *Madame Neubaur* having moved to Berlin with the better part of that dramatic company, which had formerly rendered his abode so agreeable, he did not hesitate to follow them. At Berlin he contributed to a weekly publication, wrote a history of the rise and progress of the stage, and published some of his poems. *Louvain*, the secretary to *Voltaire*, having, from motives of friendship, put him, rather prematurely, in possession of a transcript of the *Vie de Charles XII.*, the French author entered into a correspondence with *Lessing* which excited some sensation at the time. In compliance with his parents' desires, he now went to *Wittenberg*, where he took the degree of master of arts. During this time he translated a Spanish work of *Huarte* "*On Human Heads*," wrote a

criticism on the *Messiah* of *Klopstock*, and determined on making a translation of it in Latin hexameters. In 1753, he removed again to Berlin. In 1754, the second and third volume of his "Fugitive Works" were published, as likewise the first and second volume of his "*Theatrical Library*." In 1755, he became acquainted with *Nicolai* and *Mendelsohn* and removed to Potsdam, to seek retirement, for the purpose of finishing his tragedy, "*Miss Sarah Sampson*." In 1755, he went again to Leipzig, where he became acquainted with a merchant of the name of *Winckler*, whom he joined as companion on a distant journey; but the seven years' war happening to break out they proceeded no further than Holland. On his return, his abode at Leipzig was rendered irksome by *Winckler's* conduct, who was then prompted, by avarice, to endeavour to elude his engagement with *Lessing*, the fulfilment of which he was at length obliged to compel him to by legal means. An acquaintance with the celebrated poet *Kleist*, major in the Prussian service, partially compensated *Lessing* for this unpleasant alternative. In 1757, he began his tragedy of *Virginia*, which was afterwards completed and known under the title of "*Emilia Galloti*,"\* and is, with the exception of his *Nathan*—which partakes, however, of quite a different character—the most ingenious, and most carefully finished, of all his dramatic productions. In 1760, he published, jointly with *Nicolai* and *Mendelsohn*, the "*Letters*

\* Translated into English, and, I rather think, performed in London.

on the newest *Contemporary Literature*," and was, in the same year, elected member of the Berlin royal academy. About this time appeared his popular military comedy, called "*Mina von Barnhelm*," which gave rise to innumerable imitations of military dramas. He now resided at Breslau, where he composed his "*Laocoon, or the Boundaries of Poetry and Painting*," and also began to engage in theological inquiries. In 1765 he left Breslau and returned to Berlin, once more determining to devote his time to the sciences only. But having hitherto been used to an unsettled life he could not, at first, easily reconcile himself to become sedentary; and, it is said, that in his dislike to it, he once meditated placing himself at the head of an itinerant company of comedians. This will account for his removal to Hamburg in 1767, where he was invited, with very advantageous offers, by the theatrical managers, and where he wrote his hitherto unexcelled "*Dramaturgie*." There also his abode was rendered irksome both by the continual squabbles of the managers, and the self-sufficient indocility of the actors. At the same time he got entangled in the celebrated dispute with *Klotz*, originating in the latter's work on "*The Study of Antiquity*;" and another work, called "*On the Utility and Use of Antique Intaglios and their Impressions*;" which dispute he terminated with *Klotz*'s literary annihilation. Highly disgusted at his situation, he determined, at length, on a trip to Italy, which he would have accomplished but for the very acceptable offer of librarian at *Wolfenbützel*,

which the court of Brunswick made him at the instigation of the hereditary prince and of professor *Ebert*. In the library at *Wolfenbüttel* he discovered the manuscript of *Berengarius of Tours*, in which he controverts the work of the transubstantialist *Lanfrancus*. Here he also published the *Wolfenbüttel anonymous Fragments* on theological subjects, through which he got involved in controversies which afforded him an opportunity of displaying his active mind, and matchless polemical erudition, in a supereminent manner.

The *Wolfenbüttel Fragments* is an antichristian\*

\* A posthumous supplement, published by *C. A. E. Schmidt*, 1787, (without name of printer or place,) shows these fragments to be quite as anti-mosaic as anti-christian. It is entitled *Uebrig noch ungedruckte Werke des Wolfenbüttlichen Fragmentisten. Ein Nachlasz von Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, herausgegeben von C. A. E. Schmidt: i. e.* The remainder of the unedited works of the *Wolfenbüttel Fragmentist*, left behind by *Lessing*, and published by *C. A. E. Schmidt*, 1787, with notes. In his preface, the editor says, "*Lessing*, in one of his moody moments, gave me this manuscript of the *Fragmentist*, on condition not to publish it during his life. This condition, with which I strictly complied, is no longer binding. My motive for publishing these fragments is, because there are to my knowledge four transcripts of the work at *Hamburgh*, six or eight at *Berlin*, and no fewer at *Brunswick*, which, as *Lessing* said, would make more proselytes by circulating clandestinely, than they would if exposed to the contradiction of the world. I have added notes to it, in order to render the book less exceptionable, though I ultimately felt how difficult a task it is for a layman to enter into theological controversy. This work will no doubt be controverted; and so it ought; had I the ability, I would enter the lists against it myself. Should the refutation be skilful and forcible—and I wish it may—religion will have all the benefit of it; since contradiction in religion, above all things, tends most to elicit its truth; that is, however, if the *Fragmentist* meant to level his

work published by *Lessing*, who pretended to have discovered it in the library at Wolfenbittel which was under his care. That which excited most sensation, was the fifth Fragment, in which the Founder of Christianity is charged with political and ambitious motives. It has never been satisfactorily proved who was the real author of them ; nevertheless they are attributed by the majority to *Reimarus* of Hamburg, who is well known in Germany by an interesting work on the principal truths of natural religion. The Fragmentist is accused of much wilful perversion, as well as of false views and premature conclusions, owing to his want of knowledge of the ancient world. His objections were met by several writers, amongst whom *Semler*, *Döderlein*, and *Michälis* in particular, deserve to be noticed. *Döderlein's* "*Fragments and Anti-fragments*" is written with such dispassionate judgment, erudition, and taste, that it is justly considered the most successful confutation of the Fragmentist.

Amongst several works with which he occupied himself at *Wolfenbittel*, his "*Treatise on the Origin and Date of Painting in Oil Colours*," also deserves to be mentioned. Some prospects held out to him at Vienna induced him to visit that capital in 1775. However, he did not settle there, for prince Leopold of Brunswick, who was just then passing through Vienna on his journey to Italy, took attack against *essential* religion, which I, along with many others, cannot believe.

him with him to the country which had been so long the object of his ardent desire. Before his departure from Vienna he had an interview with the empress Maria Theresa, who gave him an autograph letter of recommendation to count *Firmian* at Milan. He remained but a short time in Italy; honourable and lucrative offers being made to him by the court of Manheim, in consequence of which he repaired thither in 1777; these, however, turned out empty promises, through the machinations of some illiberal men in power. Wolfenbuttel too proved an unpleasant abode to him, on account of the theological disputes in which he was involved, particularly with the head-pastor *Götze* at Hamburg, which attained to such a height that it was, at length, intended to place him under the most rigid censorial restrictions. His theological polemics he then crowned with his dramatic poem, called "*Nathan the Wise*;" a production with which no man of taste and education is or ought to be unacquainted. It is impossible not to be amazed at the stupendous mind of him who, amidst numerous poetical essays, and critical and philosophical researches of all sorts, was able to encompass the most comprehensive theological discussions; at the man who, while he exposed, on the one hand, the pitiful compound of positive and rational religion which was then beginning to be hawked about under the specious name of *Illumination*, declared war, on the other,\* against all exclusive religion, pro-

\* In his *Nathan*.



ducing models in polemics previously quite unknown. He died in 1781.

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JOHANN CASPAR LAVATER was born in 1741 at Zurich, in Switzerland, where his father practised as physician. He was educated for the church. At the age of twenty-one he established his claim to majority by a singular act of energy and intrepidity, in uniting with *Henry Füssli* (the celebrated painter) for the purpose of impeaching, before the government, the high land bailiff *Grebel*, a functionary whose injustice and oppressions none dared to attack, on account of his powerful connections. Patriotism and justice alone prompted him to this step, in which he succeeded. In consequence of a decree of the senate, *Grebel* was condemned to make restitution to the injured, and his accusers were rewarded with distinguished public esteem. His Swiss ballads, which appeared in 1767, are universally acknowledged as excellent, and his *Prospects in Futurity*, which were published in 1768, laid the foundation of his fame, and acquired him many admirers, who, beguiled by the magic of his fanciful delineation, forgave him the venturesome suppositions in which he strayed, particularly in the latter work; also for not accomplishing the elucidations about a future state, which his positive tone gave them a right to expect. In 1769, he became dean of the church of the Orphan Establishment at Zurich. His sermons, of which several volumes were printed subsequently to the year 1772, are

much admired on the continent. His book of *Morals for Servants* is a very valuable acquisition to popular literature; and his work on physiognomy is too universally known to require enumeration. He wrote two epic poems, "*Jesus Messiah*," and "*Pontius Pilate*;" by which works he showed that, for a poet he was too much of a divine, and for a divine too much of a poet. Hence may be explained his abortive attempts at converting men of real learning and consistency. However honest were his wishes, that every man of reputation, who was dear to him, would join his opinions; however patiently and indefatigably he proceeded in his efforts to convince them; still there was always something violent and revolting to the feelings of the assailed, in his customary manner of forcing them to a categorical declaration, by the alternative of refuting him or embracing his faith. In this manner, he attempted, in the ardour of youth, the conversion of the Jewish philosopher, *Mendelsohn*, which naturally did not succeed, and drew upon him, moreover, a humiliating rebuke, without however deterring him from similar unlucky attempts. Evading, or sharp answers, gave rise to passionate language on his part, in consequence of which he quarrelled with many a learned friend who otherwise esteemed him. In other respects, a perfectly pious, virtuous, philanthropic, and learned man, he died, much lamented, in 1801. The foundation of his foibles lay in his head, which was overruled by an impetuous imagination, and overstocked with eccentric conceptions. Still, if there be yet any of his numerous disciples

living, they have no reason to judge the worse of their teacher, because, though possessed of splendid talents and transcendent virtues, he was not exempt of human failings.















